Under the Cross

Sexual Abuse, Secrecy and the Vatican System

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Introduction

This book begins with a conclusion rather than a question. After examining the accumulated material, the evidence does not support treating Catholic sexual abuse simply as a succession of isolated predators who happened, independently, to enter the Church: across different centuries and institutions, recurring structures of authority, dependency, secrecy, internal discipline and protection appear again and again.

What follows is therefore not another investigation. The investigation has already been conducted; these pages present what it uncovered—the historical record, the principal cases, the mechanisms through which abuse could persist, the people and institutions involved, the financial and hierarchical environment surrounding them, and the conclusions that emerge when the cases are placed together.

The central finding is not that every priest was an abuser, nor that every Catholic institution participated in abuse. It is that certain Catholic institutional structures repeatedly created conditions in which abuse could continue: concentrated authority, spiritual dependency, secrecy, weak external oversight, transfers, institutional loyalty and the protection of reputation.

The story will therefore move from the ancient and medieval roots of sacred power, through convents and clerical authority, into the modern Church and its worldwide abuse crisis. It will follow the cases of Maciel, McCarrick, Sant'Ambrogio, Rupnik and others, before reaching the Vatican's financial and political world, Marcinkus, and our reconstruction of the Emanuela Orlandi case. The purpose is to show the whole structure—not merely the individual crimes within it.

The Ancient Religious World

Long before Christianity became the dominant religious institution of Europe, the ancient Mediterranean world contained religious cults in which ritual, secrecy, sexuality, authority and social organization could overlap. Among the most important examples for our historical reconstruction is the Bacchanalia—the rites associated with Bacchus, whose worship became sufficiently controversial in the Roman Republic that the Roman state eventually intervened against the organization surrounding the cult. The surviving evidence does not permit us to transform every ancient accusation into established fact, but it does give us something more important for the history

developed in this book: a documented example of a private religious organization whose internal rituals, leadership, finances and membership became a matter of state concern.

The decisive evidence is the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, the Roman Senate's decree of 186 BC. The decree was not concerned merely with individual acts. It reached into the structure of the religious organization itself. Bacchanal shrines were restricted; priests and officials were prohibited; common funds were forbidden; private agreements and oaths among members were restricted; meetings were controlled; and participation in the rites required authorization through the urban praetor and the Senate. The Roman authorities were therefore confronting not simply a religious belief but an organized, partially private institution possessing its own rituals, personnel, resources and internal relationships.

The wording of the decree is particularly significant. It establishes a general prohibition while simultaneously preserving a mechanism through which exceptions could be authorized. A person who claimed that a Bacchanal shrine was necessary could approach the urban praetor, after which the matter could be placed before the Senate; participation in Bacchanalian rites could likewise receive authorization. The same principle extended into the restrictions governing the organization and its gatherings. In other words, the Roman state did not merely draw an absolute line between permitted and forbidden religion: it created a hierarchy of permission in which access to the religious practice could be regulated by those possessing political authority.

This is the first structure that matters to our story: **the rule and the exception existing simultaneously**. Ordinary members could be prohibited from participating, while authorized persons could potentially obtain permission to do what others could not. The surviving inscription proves the existence of that authorization mechanism; it does not prove that senators secretly used it for themselves or that a clandestine Bacchanalian cult continued after the suppression. That distinction is essential. Our historical reconstruction goes further than the surviving inscription when it considers the possibility that privileged elites could have retained access to practices officially restricted to the wider population, but that remains a hypothesis rather than an established historical fact.

There is another feature of the Bacchanalian episode that becomes increasingly important as the chronology moves toward Christianity: **secrecy combined with institutional organization**. The Roman authorities were concerned with private rites, independent religious leadership, internal finances, meetings and relationships among members. The decree attacked that infrastructure because an organization operating partly beyond ordinary public supervision presented an accountability problem. The relevance to our

later examination of monasteries, convents, seminaries and religious orders lies precisely here. A closed institution can possess rules of its own, people with authority over its members, internal disciplinary mechanisms and restricted access from outsiders.

The sexual dimension must also be handled carefully. The ancient accusations surrounding the Bacchanalia included allegations of sexual and other criminal behavior, but the fact that Rome accused a religious movement of crimes does not establish that every accusation was true. Livy's account was written later and may reflect political and moral agendas, while the inscription itself provides firmer evidence for what the Roman state actually ordered than for the truth of every allegation made against the Bacchants. What can be established is that private religious rites involving men and women existed, that the organization possessed priests, leadership and common finances, that allegations of serious wrongdoing were made, and that the Roman state considered the organization sufficiently threatening to regulate and suppress its infrastructure.

This is where sexuality enters the larger historical problem. Religion has repeatedly claimed authority over the most intimate areas of human life: marriage, sexual conduct, reproduction, chastity, confession, bodily behavior and the boundaries between permitted and forbidden relationships. When that authority is combined with ritual and institutional hierarchy, sexuality ceases to be merely private. It becomes something that religious superiors can regulate, judge, punish, conceal, or—in circumstances where authority is abused—exploit. The later Christian history examined in this book will repeatedly return to this combination of **sexual regulation and unequal power**.

The Bacchanalian evidence therefore provides the opening historical pattern, not a completed genealogy. The question is not simply whether Christianity somehow "was" the Bacchanalia. The evidence in our material does not establish a continuous organization surviving from ancient Bacchic worship into Christianity and then into the Vatican. What it does provide is an ancient example of a problem that will recur throughout the chronology: a religious community organized around secrecy, authority, restricted access and internal rules, confronted by an external authority attempting to determine who could participate, who could lead, where rituals could occur and what organizational structures could exist.

Our more radical hypothesis begins at this point. Perhaps there was a deeper continuity than the surviving historical record currently allows us to demonstrate: perhaps elite religious practices, including sexual practices hidden from ordinary believers, survived institutional transformations as the Roman world became Christian and eventually developed into the medieval

and modern Catholic system. We cannot present that as proven history. But the possibility becomes the thread against which the subsequent evidence can be examined: **did Christianity merely replace the ancient religious system, or did certain structures of elite secrecy, sexual privilege and institutional protection survive beneath the transformation of religious names and doctrines?**

There is a more cautious possibility as well, and the evidence presently supports it more strongly: different religious systems may repeatedly generate similar structures because concentrated spiritual authority produces similar opportunities for abuse. Ancient Rome had religious organizations with leaders, money, secret meetings and privileged authorization. Medieval Christianity developed monasteries, convents and clerical hierarchies governed by religious law. Later Catholic orders created enclosed communities governed by vows and superiors. The modern Vatican combines religious hierarchy with sovereign statehood, canonical jurisdiction and centralized control over information and discipline. These institutions are not necessarily descendants of one secret organization, yet their structural similarities are impossible to ignore.

That distinction will accompany us throughout the history that follows. We will not need to claim that every ancient rite was criminal, that every medieval convent was corrupt, or that every Catholic priest was an abuser. Such claims would go beyond the material. Instead, we will follow the documented cases and ask what happens when **authority, secrecy, dependency, sexual regulation and institutional self-protection** exist together.

The Bacchanalia consequently marks the beginning of our historical journey not because it proves the existence of a two-thousand-year Vatican conspiracy, but because it provides an early surviving record of a phenomenon that will become central to the investigation presented in this book: religious institutions can create private worlds in which access, authority, money, sexuality and discipline are controlled from within. Once such a world exists, the crucial question is no longer simply what rules are written. It is **who possesses the power to enforce them, who can obtain an exception, and what happens when the people enforcing the rules become the people who violate them.**

Christianity did not emerge into an empty religious world. It appeared within the already densely populated religious landscape of the Roman Empire, a world of temples, priests, cults, sacred officials, private rites, public ceremonies and competing claims to supernatural authority. The Bacchanalian episode belongs to that earlier world, but the important point for this book is not to claim that Christianity was simply the continuation of the Bacchanalia. Our material does not establish such a direct institutional lineage. What it

allows us to examine is the transformation of religious authority itself: the ancient world already knew religious specialists who stood between ordinary people and the sacred, while Christianity developed an increasingly organized clerical structure that would give its ministers extraordinary authority over the spiritual lives of believers.

As Christianity expanded, religious authority became increasingly institutionalized. The Christian priest was not merely another member of a religious community. He came to occupy a special position within a hierarchy that distinguished clergy from laity and assigned the clergy responsibilities over worship, sacraments, instruction, discipline and the spiritual welfare of believers. The Church consequently became more than a collection of individuals sharing a belief. It became an organized institution with offices, superiors, rules, property, communities, schools, monasteries, convents and eventually a sophisticated system of ecclesiastical law.

This transformation matters because authority over the sacred can become authority over the person. A believer who accepts that a priest possesses a special capacity to administer the sacraments does not approach him merely as a teacher or neighbor. The priest may become the person who hears confession, determines whether sins have been absolved, gives spiritual direction, advises on intimate moral questions and represents the institution that promises reconciliation with God. The relationship can therefore reach into areas of life that would ordinarily remain intensely private: sexuality, marriage, guilt, family conflict, bodily conduct, temptation, fear and the hope of salvation.

The consequences of that arrangement become particularly serious when the person possessing spiritual authority is also the person to whom the dependent individual must turn for guidance. Our investigation repeatedly encountered this structure in different historical periods. The medieval and early-modern evidence shows women increasingly using priests as confessors and spiritual advisers, sometimes discussing extremely intimate matters concerning sexuality. Church authorities themselves eventually developed rules intended to prevent confessors from crossing sexual boundaries with female penitents, while historical research has identified cases in which confessors were accused of sexual misconduct toward women who came to them precisely because they trusted them as religious authorities.

The resulting relationship can be represented very simply:

BELIEVER → CONFESSION → PRIEST → INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE → SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY → POTENTIAL EXPLOITATION

The significance of this chain is not that confession inevitably produces abuse. It plainly does not. Millions of people have entered confessional relationships without being sexually exploited. The significance is structural: the institution

creates a situation in which one person possesses privileged access to another person's conscience, secrets and vulnerabilities, while simultaneously occupying a position of moral and religious authority over that person.

That distinction will become essential throughout this book. We are not arguing that religious authority itself is synonymous with sexual abuse. We are examining what can happen when legitimate authority is combined with isolation, dependency and inadequate external oversight. The same basic problem can arise in a monastery, convent, seminary, school, religious order or parish. The names and rules change, but the underlying inequality can remain: one person possesses institutional authority while another depends upon that person for spiritual guidance, education, accommodation, advancement, forgiveness or belonging.

Christianity also developed an especially powerful vocabulary for enforcing this relationship. Obedience, chastity, confession, sin, penance, vocation and salvation were not simply administrative concepts. They concerned the believer's understanding of his or her ultimate fate. A priest or superior could therefore influence not only what a person did but how that person interpreted what had happened. This becomes particularly dangerous when an authority figure commits an act that contradicts the religious morality he is supposed to represent. The victim may not initially understand the experience simply as abuse. It can instead be interpreted through guilt, obedience, sin, spiritual failure or fear of betraying the Church.

This is one reason the history of clerical sexual abuse cannot be separated from the history of religious authority. When an ordinary criminal abuses another person, the victim may understand the perpetrator primarily as an individual offender. When the perpetrator is a priest, the act can be wrapped in the authority of the institution itself. The priest may have been the person who baptized the victim, heard the victim's confession, taught the victim's children, counseled the family, represented God in the community or controlled access to religious life. The psychological boundary between the individual and the institution can therefore become extraordinarily difficult to maintain.

The problem becomes even more pronounced inside closed religious communities. A convent, monastery or seminary does not simply contain religious people; it can create a complete social environment. Members live according to institutional rules, depend upon superiors for decisions affecting their lives and may have limited contact with people outside the community. Religious vows can intensify this dependence. A novice or nun may have surrendered ordinary forms of independence precisely because she believes that obedience to her superiors is part of obedience to God.

Our historical material shows the paradox clearly. Medieval authorities became increasingly concerned about the sexual vulnerability of women religious and responded in part by strengthening enclosure. Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* of 1298 imposed stricter enclosure requirements upon religious women, and later canonists reinforced the principle. The intention could be presented as protection: women were to be separated from opportunities for sexual exploitation or transgression. But enclosure also created an institutional environment in which outsiders had less opportunity to observe what happened inside.

Thus a measure intended to protect can simultaneously produce greater opacity:

VULNERABILITY → PROTECTION → ENCLOSURE → REDUCED OUTSIDE ACCESS → GREATER INTERNAL CONTROL

This paradox will become one of the most important themes of the book. The problem is not simply that an institution possesses rules. The problem arises when the institution controls both the environment in which the vulnerable person lives and the mechanisms through which misconduct is reported, investigated and punished.

The development of Christian clerical hierarchy therefore created a system in which spiritual power could become deeply personal. A bishop could exercise authority over priests; a superior could exercise authority over members of a religious order; a spiritual director could exercise authority over a novice; a confessor could possess intimate knowledge of a penitent; and an institution could determine whether complaints were believed, investigated or suppressed. The modern abuse cases examined later in this book will repeatedly reproduce these relationships in new forms.

There is another important element in this transformation: **the institution increasingly became responsible for policing itself**. In the ancient Bacchanalian example examined on the previous page, the Roman Senate stood outside the religious organization and intervened against its organizational infrastructure. The Roman state could investigate, restrict and suppress the religious association because it was an external political authority confronting a religious organization. Christianity eventually produced a profoundly different arrangement. The Church developed its own hierarchy, its own law, its own disciplinary procedures and, ultimately, in the Vatican, its own sovereign political territory.

That difference is crucial to the later history. The modern chain can become:

CATHOLIC INSTITUTION → ABUSE → BISHOP/SUPERIOR → VATICAN → ECCLESIASTICAL INVESTIGATION

The same broad institution that gives the priest authority can therefore possess significant authority over the response to his alleged misconduct. This does not mean that every complaint was hidden or that every bishop protected every offender. Our material contains examples of investigations, removals, sanctions and eventual exposure. But it does create a structural question that will become central later: what happens when an institution's interest in protecting its reputation conflicts with its responsibility to expose wrongdoing committed by its own representatives?

The history that follows will show why this question cannot be dismissed as a modern invention. Centuries before the present abuse crisis, there were documented tensions involving clerical sexuality, confession, convent discipline, religious enclosure and the conduct of priests and religious superiors. The medieval record does **not** demonstrate that monasteries or convents were universally corrupt; indeed, the material specifically warns against turning individual scandals into a claim of general sexual collapse. What it demonstrates is that sexual misconduct existed within religious institutions and that Church authorities repeatedly had to confront the problem.

The same caution applies to the larger historical hypothesis developed in this book. We cannot demonstrate from the surviving evidence that one secret sexual organization passed unchanged from ancient Rome into Christianity and ultimately into the Vatican. The evidence supports something more concrete and, in some respects, more disturbing: religious institutions repeatedly created environments in which spiritual authority, intimate access, dependency, secrecy and internal discipline could converge. When individuals abused those structures, the institution possessed unusual power both over the victim and over the information concerning the abuse.

That is the inheritance that matters here. It is not necessarily an inheritance of one uninterrupted conspiracy. It is an inheritance of **institutional forms of sacred authority**. The ancient religious world knew privileged religious specialists and controlled sacred spaces; Christianity transformed those possibilities into an increasingly elaborate hierarchy in which clergy claimed authority over sacraments and the conscience. Medieval institutions added enclosure, vows and internal discipline; modern religious orders added international organization and mobility; and the Vatican ultimately placed these structures within a centralized ecclesiastical system possessing extraordinary political and financial power.

By the time we reach the modern period, the basic relationship is therefore already recognizable. The priest or religious superior does not merely possess personal influence. He may possess institutional authority backed by theology, hierarchy and obedience. The victim may not merely fear the individual

offender. She or he may fear losing a vocation, a community, a family's religious standing, access to the sacraments, spiritual salvation or the credibility of an accusation against a person whom the institution itself has elevated.

This is why the history of sacred abuse begins with the history of sacred power. Before examining the names that would later become synonymous with Catholic abuse scandals, we must understand the environment in which those names acquired their authority. **The central problem is not that Christianity invented human sexual exploitation. It did not. The problem is that Christianity constructed institutions in which spiritual authority could become extraordinarily intimate, hierarchical and difficult to challenge—and those characteristics would later provide powerful opportunities for abuse, concealment and institutional self-protection.**

Medieval Christianity: Confession, Clergy and Vulnerability

The medieval Church did not merely teach religious doctrine; it regulated an enormous part of the private life of the Christian population. Questions of marriage, sexuality, chastity, sin, penance and salvation were brought increasingly under ecclesiastical authority, while priests occupied a privileged position as the people who could hear confession, administer absolution and provide spiritual guidance. This created a relationship unlike an ordinary social relationship: the priest was simultaneously a religious representative, moral authority, confessor and keeper of intimate secrets.

The development of confession is therefore central to the history presented in this book. Women increasingly approached priests as confessors and spiritual advisers, and these conversations could involve extraordinarily intimate matters, including sexual behavior. The priest could know things about a woman's private life that no other person knew, while the woman was taught that revealing those things to him was not merely permissible but part of her religious obligation. The relationship could consequently place one individual in possession of both intimate information and spiritual authority over another.

This is the institutional mechanism that our investigation identifies as particularly important:

WOMAN → CONFESSION → PRIEST → INTIMATE INFORMATION → SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY → POTENTIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Nothing about the existence of confession means that abuse was inevitable. The overwhelming majority of confessional encounters did not constitute sexual exploitation. The historical significance lies elsewhere: the institution created an unusually private relationship in which one person could gain access to another person's sexuality, fears, guilt and vulnerabilities while simultaneously possessing religious authority over the person's conscience. When that authority was abused, the victim was not confronting an ordinary stranger but someone whom the institution had explicitly instructed her to trust.

The Church itself recognized the danger. Rules were eventually introduced specifically to prevent confessors from crossing sexual boundaries with female penitents. The existence of such rules is important because it establishes that the danger was not a modern invention imposed retrospectively upon medieval Christianity. Ecclesiastical authorities understood that the privileged privacy of confession could be misused and that the relationship between confessor and penitent required particular restrictions.

The historical record preserved in our material also contains cases in which those boundaries were violated. Research concerning the Spanish Inquisition identified instances of sexual misconduct by confessors toward female penitents, while evidence from the Papal States indicates that clerical sexual misconduct continued after the Council of Trent. The important point is not that every priest behaved this way, but that the institutional relationship could produce exactly the vulnerability that Church rules were intended to prevent.

The problem becomes even clearer when confession is considered alongside the medieval system of religious obedience. A woman entering religious life did not simply join a community of like-minded people. She entered a hierarchy. Her superior could possess authority over her daily existence, her religious formation, her movements and her future within the institution. A priest or chaplain could possess additional sacramental authority. If the same environment also restricted contact with the outside world, the resulting dependency could become extremely powerful.

Medieval convents provide some of the clearest evidence of this environment. The surviving episcopal records contain investigations into sexual transgressions, relationships between nuns and clerics, illegitimate births, alleged abductions, searches for escaped nuns and other disciplinary matters. York and Lincoln are particularly valuable because unusually extensive episcopal registers survived there, allowing historians to see repeated cases rather than relying exclusively on isolated scandal stories.

These records must nevertheless be read with discipline. They do not justify the old sensational picture in which medieval convents are portrayed as universally corrupt sexual establishments. The material specifically cautions

against that conclusion. Knudsen's study of the Lincoln and Norwich evidence identified 111 recorded sexual-misconduct acts involving 63 male and 19 female religious between 1430 and 1530, but concluded that misconduct occurred at relatively low and predictable rates and that historians had exaggerated the idea of a general sexual collapse of monasteries.

That finding does not weaken the history of abuse. It strengthens it by forcing us to distinguish between **documented institutional misconduct** and **generalized accusations against an entire religious population**. We do not need to claim that medieval monks or nuns were universally sexually corrupt. What matters is that specific cases occurred, that some became serious enough to enter ecclesiastical records, and that the institutional circumstances surrounding those cases reveal recurring relationships between authority, dependency and sexual access.

The Venetian material is particularly revealing. According to the evidence assembled in our investigation, thirty-three convents were involved in one or more prosecutions concerning fornication with nuns during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Nine reportedly accumulated between ten and fifty-two prosecutions, while Sant'Angelo di Contorta alone was associated with fifty-two prosecutions between 1401 and 1487, including sexual activity in cells, illegitimate births, jealous conflicts and fugitive lovers; the convent was closed in 1489.

The significance of these figures is not the sensational conclusion that "medieval nuns were promiscuous." That would confuse the records with the population as a whole. Their significance is institutional: there were religious houses in which sexual misconduct became sufficiently recurrent to generate repeated judicial proceedings. That gives us something concrete to examine—the circumstances under which misconduct repeatedly appeared, the people involved, the response of authorities and the ability of institutions to contain or expose the scandal.

And the men involved were not always anonymous outsiders. The material records vicars, chaplains and chantry priests among those repeatedly involved in relationships with nuns. Some chaplains lived on convent premises. These men could therefore possess two forms of access simultaneously: physical access to the women and sacramental authority over them. A priest could be both a potential sexual partner or offender and the person responsible for hearing confession and administering the religious consequences of sin.

That dual role is one of the most important structural features in the entire history. Imagine the position of a woman who has been involved sexually with a cleric and then has to confront that same cleric, or another priest within the same hierarchy, in matters concerning confession, penance or spiritual standing. The distinction between personal misconduct and institutional

authority becomes blurred. The institution does not merely surround the relationship; it provides the language through which the relationship is understood.

The records also reveal another form of institutional power: the ability to compel women to remain within religious communities. One case in the material concerns Agnes of St. Michael's Convent in Stamford, who repeatedly escaped over approximately a decade. Eventually the bishop ordered the prioress to have her brought back and kept in custody and solitude, threatening the prioress with excommunication if she failed to comply. The case does not prove that Agnes was sexually abused. It does, however, establish that ecclesiastical authority possessed mechanisms for locating, retrieving and forcibly returning a woman who had escaped a religious institution.

That distinction matters enormously. **Control is not itself proof of sexual abuse.** But control determines whether a person can escape abuse, report it or seek help outside the institution. When an organization possesses the authority to determine where its members live, whom they may meet, whether they may leave and what happens if they disobey, an abusive superior can potentially exploit those powers with much greater effect than an ordinary offender.

Pregnancy provides another window into this hidden world. The historical material records cases in which sexual relationships between nuns and men resulted in pregnancy and illegitimate children. Some pregnant nuns were reportedly permitted to remain hidden within their convent until giving birth, while others left temporarily and later returned. Again, pregnancy by itself does not prove rape or coercion. It is evidence of sexual relationships in institutions whose members were formally bound by chastity, and it raises the question of how institutions dealt with the consequences when their rules were violated.

This is where the history of secrecy becomes inseparable from the history of sexual misconduct. An institution may respond to a scandal by exposing it, punishing the responsible person and changing its practices. It may also attempt to contain it internally. The surviving historical record is necessarily incomplete: some transgressions were never exposed, some were hushed up, and some records have been lost or remain unpublished. We therefore know that the surviving cases represent a minimum observable population, but we cannot legitimately convert the unknown remainder into a numerical estimate of hidden victims.

Another institutional paradox now appears. Religious authorities increasingly responded to concerns about sexual misconduct by strengthening enclosure. Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* of 1298 imposed stricter enclosure requirements

upon religious women, and subsequent canonists favored strict separation of nuns from the outside world. The stated purpose could include protecting women from sexual transgression and outside influence. Yet enclosure also meant fewer opportunities for outsiders to observe what happened inside.

Thus the same institutional measure could possess two opposite consequences:

PROTECTION → ENCLOSURE → LESS OUTSIDE ACCESS → GREATER INTERNAL CONTROL

This does not mean enclosure was created to facilitate abuse. The evidence does not support such a conclusion. It means that a protective institution can nevertheless create conditions in which external oversight becomes more difficult. That paradox will become increasingly important as the chronology advances toward Sant'Ambrogio and, much later, the modern cases involving religious women.

The distinction between different forms of sexual conduct must also be maintained. Medieval records of clerical relationships do not automatically establish sexual assault. An illicit relationship between a priest and an adult woman is not necessarily equivalent to rape; a pregnancy does not establish coercion; prostitution is not identical to trafficking; and a breach of a religious vow is not automatically a criminal offense. Our investigation therefore distinguishes between clerical concubinage, consensual adult relationships, sexual exploitation, sexual assault, rape, prostitution, trafficking and institutional concealment.

Yet the existence of consensual relationships does not make the question of power disappear. A relationship involving a priest and a dependent nun, novice or penitent occurs inside a hierarchy fundamentally different from an ordinary relationship between equals. The more authority one person possesses over the other, the more carefully the question of genuine consent must be examined. This is precisely why the medieval confessional relationship matters to the modern history: it demonstrates how sexual access can become entangled with spiritual authority without requiring us to pretend that every historical sexual relationship was an assault.

The same structure appears in later centuries. The historical sequence assembled in our investigation runs from medieval clerical relationships and convent scandals through Renaissance and early-modern religious institutions, stricter enclosure, the Sant'Ambrogio scandal and eventually the modern abuse cases. The individual circumstances change, but several elements repeatedly return: **religious authority, dependency, sexual access, secrecy, internal discipline and institutional reputation**.

This is the point at which the medieval record becomes more than background history. It gives us an early institutional model for a problem that will later become unmistakable in the modern Catholic Church. A person entrusted with spiritual authority can obtain intimate knowledge and privileged access; a dependent person can find it difficult to resist or report that authority; a closed community can restrict outside scrutiny; and the institution itself can become the place where the complaint is processed.

The medieval Church did not invent sexual abuse, and the surviving evidence does not establish an uninterrupted organization of abusers stretching from the Middle Ages to the present. What the evidence does establish is something more concrete: **sexual misconduct occurred within Christian religious institutions; clergy sometimes occupied positions that gave them extraordinary access to vulnerable people; ecclesiastical authorities knew enough about the danger to create rules against particular forms of misconduct; and the same institutions possessed mechanisms of enclosure, discipline and internal investigation that could either protect victims or limit their ability to escape and speak.**

That is the medieval inheritance we carry forward. The sacred relationship between priest and believer could provide genuine consolation and spiritual guidance. But because it placed one human being in a position of exceptional trust and another in a position of exceptional dependence, it also created an opportunity for those who were willing to turn sacred authority into personal power. In the centuries ahead, that opportunity would not disappear. It would become more sophisticated, more institutionalized—and, eventually, part of the modern Vatican system examined in the pages that follow.

Among all the mechanisms that emerge from the medieval and early-modern material, confession is one of the most important. It transformed the relationship between the ordinary believer and the priest by creating a privileged private space in which questions of sin, sexuality, fear, guilt and personal conduct could be discussed under the authority of the Church. Women in particular increasingly used priests not only as confessors but also as spiritual advisers, creating relationships in which the priest could acquire unusually intimate knowledge of the woman's private life. Church authorities eventually recognized the danger that this intimacy could be abused and introduced rules intended to prevent confessors from crossing sexual boundaries with female penitents. Our investigation found that historical research into the Spanish Inquisition identifies cases of sexual misconduct by confessors toward female penitents, while research into the Papal States documents clerical sexual misconduct continuing after the Council of Trent. The significance is not that confession itself was abusive; it is that the institution created a relationship in which spiritual authority and intimate personal knowledge were concentrated in the hands of one person.

This produces one of the clearest mechanisms in the entire history we have reconstructed:

WOMAN → CONFESSION → PRIEST → INTIMATE INFORMATION → SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY → POTENTIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The importance of this sequence becomes apparent when confession is considered together with the broader structure of Christian religious life. A woman approaching a priest in confession was not approaching an ordinary adviser. She was approaching a representative of the Church who possessed recognized spiritual authority and whose role was connected with the most fundamental questions of Christian existence: sin, forgiveness, salvation and obedience. The relationship therefore contained a built-in imbalance. The penitent disclosed herself; the priest received the disclosure. The penitent sought guidance; the priest provided it. The penitent entered the relationship as the person seeking spiritual assistance, while the priest occupied the position of authority. When the relationship remained within its legitimate boundaries, this could be experienced as religious guidance and consolation. When the priest crossed those boundaries, however, the very structure that created trust could become an instrument of exploitation.

This is why the history of confession cannot be separated from the history of sexual abuse within religious institutions. The central issue is not simply physical access. It is **access to the person**. The priest could gain knowledge about sexuality, relationships, fears, vulnerabilities and private circumstances that would otherwise remain inaccessible. A relationship that began as sacramental could develop into a continuing relationship of spiritual direction and dependence. The person who had first been trusted because he was a priest could consequently acquire influence extending far beyond the moment of confession. The danger was greatest where spiritual authority was combined with other forms of dependence: religious vows, institutional residence, social isolation, control over a person's vocation, or the fear that challenging a priest meant challenging the Church itself.

The historical material concerning religious women makes this mechanism particularly clear. The investigation identified a recurring structure in which a religious woman could be dependent upon a priest or superior for spiritual guidance, confession and institutional direction. The resulting pattern can be described as:

RELIGIOUS WOMAN → PRIEST / SUPERIOR → SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY → CONFESSION / COUNSELING → DEPENDENCY → SEXUAL EXPLOITATION → RELIGIOUS ORDER → INTERNAL DISCIPLINE / SILENCE

The individual cases varied enormously, but the underlying relationship remained recognizable. A woman entering religious life accepted a system based upon obedience and hierarchy. Her spiritual advisers possessed authority that extended beyond ordinary social relationships. If that authority was abused sexually, the victim could be placed in an exceptionally difficult position because the person responsible for the abuse could simultaneously be someone whom the institution had taught her to regard as a spiritual guide.

This helps explain why our investigation treats confession as more important than the sensational idea of medieval "convent brothels." There certainly was medieval prostitution on a substantial scale, including public and private brothels, bathhouses, prostitution rings and forms of municipal regulation. But our material specifically warns against turning that wider history into the claim that medieval convents generally functioned as brothels. The stronger historical finding is more precise: sexual misconduct occurred within particular religious communities, and confession and spiritual authority created a mechanism through which clerical access to women could become intimate and potentially exploitative.

The distinction is essential because our purpose is not to replace one exaggerated story with another. If every medieval sexual scandal were interpreted as proof that the entire Church was organized around sexual exploitation, the argument would become weaker rather than stronger. The investigation instead found evidence of specific institutional mechanisms that can be followed through time. There were cases involving religious women; there were cases involving clerical sexual relationships; there were cases involving spiritual authority; there were cases in which Church authorities recognized sexual misconduct as a problem; and there were cases in which the closed character of religious institutions made outside scrutiny more difficult. Together these findings establish a historical environment in which abuse could occur without requiring the claim that every religious community was abusive.

The problem of secrecy is particularly important. Confession is based upon confidentiality, and religious institutions have historically treated information obtained through spiritual relationships as specially protected. Confidentiality can have a legitimate purpose: without it, believers might not speak honestly about their private lives. But the same secrecy can become dangerous when the person receiving the information is himself abusing his authority. A victim who has been taught that religious matters are private may hesitate to speak outside the institution. A complaint against a priest is therefore not merely a complaint against an individual. It can feel like an accusation against someone who represents God, the Church and the religious community upon which the victim depends.

This problem becomes even more serious inside closed communities. Our investigation found that stricter enclosure of religious women developed partly in response to concerns about sexual transgression. Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* of 1298 imposed much stricter enclosure requirements on religious women, and subsequent canonists favored strict separation of nuns from the outside world. The intention could be understood as protecting religious women from sexual contact and outside influence. Yet the institutional consequence could also be reduced outside oversight. The pattern is therefore paradoxical: **religious women → fear of sexual transgression → stricter enclosure → less outside access.** Enclosure could protect women, but it could also make external scrutiny of what happened within the institution more difficult.

The same paradox appears whenever an institution responds to danger by increasing internal control. The existence of rules does not automatically guarantee protection. What matters is who controls the rules, who controls access to the victim, who receives complaints and who possesses the authority to determine whether misconduct has occurred. A highly regulated environment can therefore be either protective or dangerous depending upon how its authority is exercised.

This is one of the reasons the historical material surrounding Sant'Ambrogio becomes so important. The nineteenth-century scandal involved a closed religious women's community in which spiritual hierarchy, sexual relationships, coercion, supernatural claims, religious obedience and institutional secrecy became intertwined. Sant'Ambrogio consequently provides a bridge between the older history of confession and the modern cases of abuse involving religious women. The underlying architecture is comparable even though the individual circumstances are different: **closed religious community → spiritual hierarchy → sexual relationships or coercion → internal secrecy → difficulty of external investigation.**

The modern Rupnik case demonstrates why this historical mechanism still matters. Our investigation identified allegations involving more than twenty women, predominantly former nuns, with claims of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse. The particularly important feature is the alleged combination of spiritual authority and sexual exploitation. The material describes a mechanism in which spiritual authority could become manipulation, manipulation could affect conscience, religious justification could be used within the relationship, and sexual exploitation could follow. This is why the investigation treated Rupnik not simply as another sexual-abuse case but as a modern example of what has been termed **spiritual abuse**.

The comparison is striking:

MEDIEVAL / EARLY-MODERN
confessor → nun → spiritual authority → sexual misconduct

MODERN
priest → novice / nun → spiritual authority → sexual exploitation

The people are different. The institutions have changed. The surrounding legal environment is different. Yet the relationship of authority remains recognizable. A priest or spiritual superior possesses authority that the dependent woman has accepted as part of her religious life. The same religious relationship that is supposed to guide and protect her can therefore become the means through which she is manipulated.

The importance of confession extends beyond women religious. Our broader investigation of Catholic abuse identified a much wider system in which children, seminarians, students, parishioners and vulnerable adults could enter relationships with priests through the ordinary structures of Catholic life. The institutional categories differ—church, school, seminary, religious order, orphanage, convent—but the underlying question remains the same: how much access does the religious authority possess, how dependent is the person receiving his guidance, and what happens when that authority is abused?

This is why the investigation repeatedly returned to the distinction between **sexual misconduct and institutional sexual exploitation**. An illicit relationship between adults is not automatically equivalent to rape. Clerical concubinage is not automatically sexual assault. A violation of a religious vow is not automatically a criminal offense. Prostitution is not identical to trafficking. And an allegation is not automatically an established fact. Our material explicitly separates these categories because they carry different evidentiary and legal meanings.

But the existence of those distinctions does not remove the problem of power. When a priest possesses authority over a dependent person, the circumstances surrounding a sexual relationship must be examined differently from a relationship between two people with equal institutional power. Spiritual authority can influence the person's understanding of obedience, guilt, duty and consent. This is precisely why the concept of spiritual abuse becomes so important in the modern cases: the alleged harm does not consist only of the sexual act itself, but also of the misuse of a person's religious dependence to obtain or maintain control.

The historical importance of confession is therefore not that it proves a continuous Catholic conspiracy extending across centuries. Our investigation did not establish such a continuity. Nor does the existence of sexual misconduct by confessors prove that the sacrament was created for sexual exploitation. What the material does establish is much more concrete:

confession placed priests in a position of extraordinary intimacy with believers; sexual misconduct by confessors was recognized historically; Church authorities developed rules intended to prevent it; and the same combination of spiritual authority, intimate knowledge and dependency appears in later cases involving religious women and other vulnerable people.

This makes confession one of the earliest recognizable mechanisms in our history of sacred abuse. It shows how the Church's authority could penetrate beyond public religious practice into the private conscience of the individual. It created a relationship in which the priest could know what others did not know, advise where others could not advise, and exercise spiritual authority where ordinary social authority ended.

The significance becomes greater when we follow the mechanism forward. In the medieval world, it appears in the relationship between priest and penitent and in the sexual misconduct associated with some confessors. In closed religious communities, it becomes part of the relationship between priest, superior and nun. In Sant'Ambrogio, spiritual authority and sexual exploitation become intertwined within a notorious enclosed community. In Rupnik, the same basic relationship appears in modern form, involving spiritual authority, psychological manipulation and allegations of sexual exploitation. The names and circumstances change, but the structural vulnerability remains visible.

The confessional therefore deserves to be understood as more than a religious ritual. It became a **door into private power**. Through that door passed the believer's secrets, fears, sexuality and conscience. For the trustworthy priest, that access could be used responsibly. For the abusive priest, it could become an extraordinary advantage. And when the institution surrounding the relationship was closed, hierarchical and protective of its own authority, the victim could face a second problem after the abuse itself: the difficulty of escaping the structure that had created the relationship in the first place.

That is the historical lesson we carry forward. Sacred authority can provide genuine care, but it also creates opportunities for domination when its boundaries fail. The more intimate the authority becomes, the greater the potential vulnerability. Confession made the priest intimate with the hidden life of the believer; religious obedience made the superior authoritative over the dependent; enclosure reduced outside access; and institutional hierarchy determined who could act when accusations arose.

The later history of Catholic sexual abuse will show this mechanism operating alongside others—money, institutional prestige, powerful patrons, secrecy, transfers, centralized authority and the protection of reputation. But the basic relationship is already present here. **The Church created a system in**

which certain men were entrusted with access not merely to the bodies of believers, but to their consciences and their most private fears. When that sacred trust was violated, the resulting abuse could become far more difficult to recognize, resist and expose than an ordinary act of sexual predation.

Closed Religious Communities

The history of sacred abuse changes substantially when we move from the individual relationship between priest and penitent to the institutions in which religious people actually lived. A confession might last minutes; a religious community could surround a person for years. Convents, monasteries, seminaries, religious houses, schools, orphanages and other Catholic institutions could become complete social environments in which the institution controlled important aspects of daily life, religious formation, relationships, movement and discipline. The significance of these environments is not that they were inherently abusive. It is that **isolation, hierarchy, obedience, dependency and restricted outside access can create conditions in which misconduct becomes more difficult to detect and challenge**. That structural problem appears repeatedly in the material gathered during our investigation.

A closed religious community operates differently from an ordinary parish. In a parish, the priest has authority, but the believer normally continues to live within a wider society of family, friends, schools, workplaces and government institutions. A person living inside a religious order or convent may instead depend upon the institution for accommodation, education, spiritual direction, social relationships and the organization of everyday life. The person may have entered precisely because he or she accepted a system of obedience. What begins as voluntary religious commitment can therefore create substantial dependence once the individual is inside the institution.

This is particularly important for women religious. The historical material in our investigation shows that Church authorities became increasingly concerned about controlling women's sexual relationships with the outside world. Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* of 1298 imposed much stricter enclosure requirements upon religious women, and later canonists favored strict separation of nuns from the outside world. The reasoning included protection from sexual transgression and outside influence. Yet the institutional consequence was paradoxical: **the measure intended to protect religious women could simultaneously reduce the ability of outsiders to observe what happened inside the institution.**

The paradox can be expressed simply:

SEXUAL DANGER
↓
PROTECTIVE ENCLOSURE
↓
LESS CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD
↓
LESS OUTSIDE OVERSIGHT
↓
GREATER INTERNAL CONTROL

This does not mean that enclosure was introduced in order to conceal abuse. The material does not establish that. Nor does enclosure itself prove that abuse occurred. Its importance is structural. When a person is separated from the outside world, the people responsible for her protection may also become the people who control the information available about her condition. If those authorities act properly, the system may function as protection. If they abuse their authority, however, the same structure can make exposure more difficult.

The surviving medieval Bishops' Registers provide evidence of precisely the kinds of conflicts that occurred inside religious communities. The records include investigations into scandals, sexual transgressions, apostasy, punishments, searches for escaped nuns, alleged abductions, relationships between nuns and clerics and illegitimate births. York and Lincoln are especially valuable because unusually long episcopal registers survived there, allowing historians to reconstruct institutional conditions over substantial periods rather than relying entirely upon isolated stories.

The existence of these records is important for another reason. They show that religious institutions were not completely beyond supervision. Bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities could investigate misconduct and impose disciplinary measures. The historical record therefore contains both sides of the institutional equation: religious communities could be highly controlled environments, but they could also become subjects of ecclesiastical investigation when scandals emerged.

The surviving record must nevertheless be interpreted carefully. Many incidents may never have been recorded, while others may have been hushed up or remain in unpublished or lost registers. At the same time, the surviving offenders cannot be extrapolated to all nuns or all religious communities. The correct conclusion is therefore that the surviving evidence represents a **minimum observable population** of documented misconduct, not a measurement of the total amount of abuse that may have existed.

The Venetian evidence is particularly striking because it moves beyond isolated incidents. The material reports that thirty-three convents were involved in one or more prosecutions concerning fornication with nuns during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Nine reportedly accumulated between ten and fifty-two prosecutions. Sant'Angelo di Contorta was associated with fifty-two prosecutions between 1401 and 1487, involving sexual activity in cells, illegitimate births, jealous conflicts and fugitive lovers; the convent was eventually closed in 1489.

These figures should not be transformed into the crude statement that medieval nuns were generally sexually promiscuous. They demonstrate something more precise and more useful: **there were religious houses in which sexual misconduct became sufficiently recurrent to generate repeated judicial proceedings**. That is an institutional phenomenon. It tells us that the rules governing chastity and enclosure did not eliminate sexual relationships or misconduct, and that some communities repeatedly confronted the consequences.

The identity of the men involved is equally important. According to the material, vicars, chaplains and chantry priests frequently appeared in relationships with nuns, and some chaplains actually lived on convent premises. This created a particularly significant combination of authority and access. These men were not simply outsiders entering a religious institution once. Some possessed physical proximity to the women as well as religious authority, including the ability to hear their confessions.

The resulting structure is one of the earliest clear institutional patterns in our investigation:

AUTHORITY
↓
DEPENDENCY
↓
SEXUAL ACCESS
↓
CONTROL OVER RELIGIOUS CONSEQUENCES

This is considerably more important than the simple statement that priests sometimes had sexual relationships with nuns. The institutional problem arises because the same person could potentially occupy multiple roles. A cleric could be a religious authority, a confessor and a person with physical access to a religious woman. The woman could simultaneously depend upon the institution for her religious life and be subject to the spiritual authority of the man involved.

The evidence concerning women who attempted to leave religious communities reveals another dimension of institutional power. The material records the case of Agnes of St. Michael's Convent in Stamford, who repeatedly escaped over approximately a decade. Eventually the bishop ordered the prioress to have her brought back and kept in custody and solitude, threatening the prioress with excommunication if she failed to comply. This case does **not** prove that Agnes had been sexually abused. What it demonstrates is that the Church possessed mechanisms for locating, retrieving and forcibly returning women who had left religious communities.

That distinction is essential. The existence of an institutional power to return an escaped nun is not evidence that every woman was being held against her will, nor does it establish sexual exploitation. It does, however, demonstrate how dramatically the balance of power could favor the institution. A person attempting to leave could face religious sanctions and coercive institutional mechanisms. If misconduct occurred inside such an environment, the victim's ability to simply walk away could be much more limited than that of someone living outside the institution.

Pregnancy provides another documentary window into this closed world. The material describes cases in which relationships between nuns and men resulted in pregnancy and illegitimate children. Some pregnant nuns were reportedly permitted to remain hidden within their convent until giving birth, while others left temporarily and later returned. Once again, pregnancy is not equivalent to rape, and the existence of an illegitimate birth does not establish coercion. But in a supposedly celibate institution, pregnancy is evidence that sexual relationships occurred and that the institution had to manage the consequences.

This introduces concealment as an important institutional category. A religious community could have reasons to keep a pregnancy, sexual relationship or scandal within the institution rather than expose it publicly. That does not mean every instance of concealment constituted a deliberate criminal cover-up. Institutions may conceal information for many reasons, including protecting reputation, avoiding scandal, preserving the community or attempting to resolve a matter internally. But from the perspective of abuse, the consequence can be the same: **the fewer people outside the institution who know what happened, the harder independent accountability becomes.**

The Portuguese material in our investigation adds another example of the intersection between elite power and enclosed religious communities. The supplied material describes the alleged relationship between King João V and Sister Paula Teresa de Silva, abbess of Odivelas, including claims of substantial financial benefits and a child, as well as claims concerning

relationships between João V and other nuns. Contemporary material, including Augustus Hervey's diary, was also identified as relevant to relationships between elite men and women in convent environments. However, the investigation itself classified some of the more dramatic claims—such as Odivelas functioning literally as an organized brothel—as requiring further verification.

What matters most in this material is therefore not the sensational label of a "nun brothel." The more significant structural issue is the possibility of an interaction between **elite political power, religious institutional power, female dependency and sexual access**. Where a powerful secular man enters an enclosed religious environment and develops relationships with women who theoretically belong to a sacred institution, the question of power becomes unavoidable. Consent cannot simply be assumed because the participants were adults; neither can coercion simply be assumed because one participant was powerful. The evidence must be examined according to the actual circumstances.

The same methodological discipline applies to the medieval association between convents and prostitution. Our material specifically warns against the claim that medieval convents generally functioned as brothels. Medieval Europe certainly had substantial prostitution, including public and private brothels, prostitution rings, bathhouses and municipal regulation. The existence of prostitution in the wider Christian urban environment does not establish that communities of nuns operated those establishments. The Tallinn example is particularly revealing: the "Red Convent" appears in the supplied material as the name of a medieval brothel, not as evidence that a community of nuns was running a brothel.

The distinction is important because the history of closed religious communities becomes more compelling when it is based on what the evidence actually establishes. We do not need myths about "whore convents." We have something more substantial: documented prosecutions, relationships between nuns and clerics, illegitimate births, disciplinary proceedings, escaped religious women being recovered, enclosed communities, and religious authorities exercising control over the lives of their members. These are institutional facts from which the problem of vulnerability can be understood without exaggeration.

The same principle becomes even more important when we move forward into modern Catholic institutions. The investigation found that the structure of the modern religious order could be considerably larger than a medieval convent. Marcial Maciel's Legion of Christ, for example, contained seminaries, schools, universities, religious houses, charities, educational centers, oratories and chapels. At the height of the organization, the material describes fifteen

universities, fifty seminaries and institutes, 177 middle schools, thirty-four schools for disadvantaged children, 125 religious houses, 200 educational centers and approximately 1,200 oratories and chapels.

The importance of this scale is obvious. A powerful religious superior operating inside a single parish can have access to a limited number of people. A religious founder controlling an international organization containing seminaries, schools and religious houses can have access to a much larger population while also possessing organizational authority. The institutional environment itself becomes a network of relationships through which authority can travel.

The Maciel material provides an especially clear example of how dependency could be intensified by internal control. According to the material, Maciel's organization combined thousands of seminarians with schools, universities, religious houses, charities, political connections, direct papal access and internal surveillance. He allegedly read correspondence, monitored telephone calls, scrutinized friendships, selected favored seminarians, demanded obedience, prohibited criticism and imposed a vow of silence.

The resulting mechanism is considerably more sophisticated than simple physical isolation:

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION
↓
SEMINARY / SCHOOL / RELIGIOUS HOUSE
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
DEPENDENCY
↓
INFORMATION CONTROL
↓
OBEDIENCE / SILENCE
↓
DIFFICULTY OF CHALLENGE

Here we see the same institutional principle appearing in modern form. The closed community does not have to be a stone convent surrounded by medieval walls. It can be an international religious organization containing schools, seminaries and houses in different countries. Isolation can be psychological and organizational as well as physical. A young seminarian may live within a community whose rules govern his relationships, communications and future. A student may depend upon teachers and religious authorities. A member of a religious order may depend upon superiors for decisions affecting his or her vocation.

The investigation therefore expanded the concept of the "closed religious community." It includes not only convents and monasteries but **seminaries, religious orders, clerical residences, Catholic orphanages, schools and charismatic Catholic movements**. The common element is not architecture. It is the concentration of authority and the possibility of restricted outside access.

This broader definition is essential because sexual abuse in Catholic institutions does not follow one victim-perpetrator model. The material identifies multiple directions of abuse: male clergy toward children and women; religious women toward children and dependent people; superiors toward subordinate nuns; spiritual directors toward dependent persons; teachers and priests toward children; and institutional personnel toward vulnerable people. The environment may change, but dependency remains one of the central variables.

The school and orphanage environment demonstrates why the system cannot be reduced to the confessional. Children may enter Catholic institutions because parents trust them, because education is provided there, because the institution offers accommodation, or because religious organizations operate orphanages and boarding institutions. Once inside, the child can become dependent upon adults whose authority is reinforced by the institution. The same organizational structure that promises protection can therefore create an environment in which a perpetrator has repeated access to vulnerable people.

This is why the central institutional variables identified in our investigation are so important:

secrecy + hierarchy + isolation + spiritual authority + internal discipline + restricted outside access.

None of these variables proves abuse on its own. A religious community can be secretive without being abusive; a seminary can be hierarchical without being abusive; a school can be isolated without concealing crimes. The danger arises from their combination, particularly when the institution also controls the information about misconduct and the process through which complaints are handled.

The institutional problem can therefore be stated in one sentence: **the person who is supposed to protect the vulnerable person may also control the environment in which that person lives, the information surrounding the alleged abuse and the disciplinary process that follows the complaint.**

That is the point at which the history of closed communities connects directly to the modern Vatican investigation. The question is no longer simply whether

individual priests or religious superiors committed sexual acts. We must examine the institutional architecture around them: Who controlled the victim's environment? Who knew what happened? Who could report it? Who could punish the offender? Who could transfer him? Who controlled the information? And, eventually, what happened when the matter reached the higher levels of the Church?

The material does not support the conclusion that every closed Catholic institution was an abuse environment. It supports a more precise conclusion. Across different periods, religious institutions created forms of enclosure, obedience and dependency that could make individuals highly vulnerable to those who possessed authority over them. When sexual misconduct occurred, the same hierarchy that governed the community could also influence whether the misconduct became public.

This is the institutional continuity that matters to our book. We do not need to claim that a single secret organization survived unchanged from medieval convents into modern seminaries. Our material explicitly distinguishes that unsupported proposition from the stronger historical observation that **different Catholic institutions repeatedly developed similar structural characteristics**. The medieval convent had enclosure and internal authority; the modern religious order has hierarchy, vows, dependency and institutional secrecy; the seminary provides controlled formation and access to future clergy; schools and orphanages provide access to vulnerable children.

The recurrence is therefore more important than the architectural form. A medieval convent and a twentieth-century seminary are obviously not the same institution. But both can create a world in which authority is concentrated, obedience is expected, outside access is limited and the institution possesses substantial control over the people inside it. When abuse enters that environment, the victim may find that the ordinary mechanisms of escape and accountability are weaker than they would be outside.

This is why the history of sexual abuse must include the history of institutional enclosure. Abuse does not exist only in the moment of the assault. It exists within the conditions that permit access, create dependency, discourage resistance, restrict disclosure and determine what happens afterward. The closed community can therefore become both the setting in which abuse occurs and the structure within which its consequences are managed.

From the medieval convent to the modern religious order, the same fundamental problem repeatedly appears: **who controls the closed world?** If the answer is a hierarchy whose authority extends over residence, vocation, discipline, spiritual life and information, then the protection of vulnerable people depends heavily upon the integrity of that hierarchy.

And when that integrity fails, isolation becomes more than physical separation. It becomes institutional isolation—the condition in which the victim is surrounded by the very structure from which protection should come, while the outside world may know little or nothing about what is happening inside. That is the environment in which the later history of Catholic sexual abuse becomes possible to understand.

From Medieval Structures to the Modern Church

The passage from the medieval Church into the modern age did not abolish the institutional structures that had made religious authority so powerful. The buildings changed, the scale changed, the geography changed, and Catholic institutions became increasingly sophisticated, but the fundamental hierarchy remained. Priests, bishops, religious superiors and other ecclesiastical authorities continued to exercise authority over people whose lives could be deeply dependent upon the Church. What changed most dramatically was the **scale at which that authority could operate**.

The medieval convent was a relatively contained institution. The modern Catholic Church became a worldwide network. Religious orders established houses and communities across national borders; seminaries trained future clergy; schools educated children; orphanages cared for vulnerable populations; hospitals placed religious personnel in positions of trust; and charitable organizations extended Catholic institutions into virtually every part of social life. The result was not the disappearance of the closed religious environment but its multiplication. A person no longer had to enter a medieval convent to become dependent upon a Catholic institution. A child could encounter the Church through a school or orphanage; a young man through a seminary; a woman through a religious order; a patient through a hospital; and a family through a parish or charitable institution.

The twentieth century therefore produced a new institutional landscape in which the old mechanisms of authority could operate across enormous distances. The central characteristic was still hierarchy. Catholic organizations were not flat associations in which every member possessed equal authority. They were structured vertically, with superiors exercising authority over subordinates and bishops exercising authority within dioceses, while religious orders maintained their own chains of command. At the highest level stood the Vatican and the papacy, surrounded by offices, congregations and officials capable of receiving information, issuing decisions and exercising disciplinary authority.

This hierarchy could provide organization and accountability. It could also create dependency. A person inside a religious institution might depend upon superiors for decisions concerning his or her vocation, residence, education, assignments and future. A seminarian could depend upon those responsible for his formation. A child in a Catholic school could depend upon teachers and religious personnel. A person living in an orphanage or other Catholic institution could depend upon the institution for basic care. Religious authority could therefore overlap with practical authority over everyday life.

The modern religious order illustrates the transformation particularly clearly. The material gathered in our investigation describes Marcial Maciel's Legion of Christ as an organization possessing thousands of seminarians together with schools, universities, religious houses, charitable organizations, educational centers, oratories and chapels. At its height, the organization is described as having **15 universities, 50 seminaries and institutes, 177 middle schools, 34 schools for disadvantaged children, 125 religious houses, 200 educational centres and approximately 1,200 oratories and chapels**.

This scale changes the nature of institutional power. The superior of a medieval religious house could exercise enormous authority within a particular community, but the leader of a modern international religious organization could operate through a network extending across countries and institutions. A single organization could contain the places where young people were educated, the seminaries where men were trained for priesthood, the houses where religious members lived and the charitable institutions through which the organization maintained its public reputation.

The importance of this development becomes particularly clear in the Maciel case. According to the material, his organization combined **seminaries, schools, universities, religious houses, charities, political connections, fundraising capacity, direct papal access, internal surveillance and a vow of silence preventing criticism of superiors**. The institutional environment therefore contained many of the elements already encountered in earlier periods, but on a much larger scale. Spiritual authority was joined to organizational authority, physical proximity to young people, financial resources and control of information.

The mechanism can be stated plainly:

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY
↓
INSTITUTIONAL DEPENDENCY
↓
SEMINARY / SCHOOL / RELIGIOUS HOUSE
↓

PHYSICAL ACCESS
↓
INFORMATION CONTROL
↓
OBEDIENCE AND SILENCE

This does not mean that every school, seminary or religious house constituted an abuse environment. The material specifically rejects the idea that the existence of abuse cases allows us to characterize every Catholic institution in the same way. The significance lies in the structure: the expansion of Catholic institutions created many more environments in which authority, dependency and access could be concentrated.

The twentieth-century Church also retained extensive experience in controlling information inside a highly hierarchical organization. The material concerning the Sodalitium Pianum describes a clandestine intelligence and propaganda network involving informants and surveillance. Our investigation explicitly distinguishes this from a sexual-abuse network: the existence of such an organization does **not** establish that it was involved in sexual abuse. What it demonstrates is that the Catholic hierarchy possessed historical mechanisms for gathering information, monitoring people and controlling dissent. That institutional characteristic becomes relevant when examining later questions of secrecy and abuse reporting.

Information is crucial because abuse cannot become an institutional problem until someone knows about it. A predator may operate alone, but once an allegation reaches a superior, bishop, religious order or Vatican office, the institution possesses choices. It can investigate. It can discipline. It can report. It can transfer. It can restrict the accused person's activities. It can also, in documented cases, fail to act adequately or allow an accused cleric to move elsewhere. The modern institutional system therefore transforms the question from **"Who committed the abuse?"** to **"Who knew, who had authority to act, and what happened after they knew?"**

That question is central to the network model developed in our investigation:

VICTIM → PERPETRATOR → IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR → BISHOP / RELIGIOUS ORDER → VATICAN OFFICE → INTERNAL INVESTIGATION / TRANSFER / DISCIPLINE → EVENTUAL EXPOSURE

Around this chain sit the additional forces of **money, political influence, papal access, media influence, institutional reputation, victim dependency, religious authority and international connections**. The modern Church's expansion made every one of these additional connections potentially more significant because institutions were no longer confined to one local community.

International expansion also created mobility. A religious order could operate in several countries. A priest could serve in different dioceses. A member of a religious community could be moved from one institution to another. The material identifies documented evidence of accused clergy appearing across organizational boundaries and notes that the John Jay researchers identified **143 priests with allegations in more than one diocese, eparchy or religious community**, representing 3.3 percent of priests with allegations in their dataset.

That finding is important because it demonstrates that the institutional boundaries of Catholicism did not necessarily correspond to the boundaries of an individual perpetrator's activity. A priest could belong to one institution at one point and another institution later. When accusations followed him, the problem was no longer confined to a single parish. It became a question of communication between institutions: Did the receiving institution know? Did the sending institution disclose the allegations? Did a superior intervene? Was the person transferred? Was the transfer disciplinary, protective, or simply administrative?

The material describes this as **inter-institutional mobility**, one of three overlapping networks identified during the investigation. The first is institutional concealment: abuse, complaint, superior, transfer, new institution and potentially new victims. The second is sexual exploitation: predator, spiritual or institutional access, victim and repeated abuse. The third is mobility across dioceses, countries and religious orders. These networks do not have to be centrally commanded by the Vatican to have serious consequences. They can operate through decentralized decisions made by bishops, religious superiors and other authorities while remaining part of the same institutional ecosystem.

This is an important departure from the simplistic idea of a single centralized conspiracy. The material's stronger conclusion is that a **transnational Catholic abuse ecosystem** could exist without requiring one person or one office to direct every act. Individual predators operated within dioceses, religious orders, schools, seminaries and other Catholic institutions. Institutional authorities sometimes concealed allegations, transferred accused clergy, failed to warn receiving institutions or otherwise prioritized institutional interests over victim protection. The resulting system could therefore be interconnected without being a single centrally commanded organization.

The Vatican's position within this expanding system also changed over time. The material divides the modern history into distinct periods. From approximately the 1940s to 2000, local bishops and religious orders retained enormous discretion, while Rome might learn about particularly serious cases

without possessing the centralized abuse-reporting system that would develop later. Beginning in 2001, the handling of serious clerical sexual-abuse cases became increasingly centralized in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This created a fundamental institutional transition: **decentralized diocesan handling → centralized Vatican handling**.

That transition matters because centralization can produce two opposite outcomes. It can increase accountability by bringing serious cases before a central authority capable of imposing sanctions. But it can also concentrate information inside the institution. The question is therefore not simply whether Rome acquired more authority. The important question is what happened to that authority once it was acquired.

The statistics recorded in our material demonstrate the scale reached by this centralized system. For the period 2004–2014, the material records approximately **3,400 abuse cases received by the Vatican, 848 priests dismissed from the clerical state and another 2,572 subjected to lesser sanctions**. Whatever conclusions are drawn from these figures, they demonstrate that by the twenty-first century sexual-abuse cases had become a major component of the Vatican's formal disciplinary machinery.

The modern Church therefore cannot be described simply as an unchanged medieval institution. It became something considerably more complicated. It possessed international religious orders, enormous educational networks, seminaries, charitable organizations and other institutions; it had mechanisms for communication and discipline extending to Rome; and eventually it developed a centralized system for processing serious abuse cases. Yet beneath these modern administrative developments remained the same basic features that had already appeared in earlier periods: hierarchy, spiritual authority, institutional dependency and the ability of superiors to control information and disciplinary responses.

The problem of abuse by religious women also demonstrates that the modern system cannot be reduced to male priests abusing children. The material records abuse by nuns and other religious women involving children and dependent people, while separately identifying abuse of adult religious women by male clergy and spiritual superiors. This produces a broader institutional picture:

MALE CLERGY → CHILDREN / WOMEN / ADULTS

RELIGIOUS WOMEN → CHILDREN / DEPENDENT PEOPLE

SUPERIOR → SUBORDINATE RELIGIOUS

SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR → DEPENDENT PERSON

INSTITUTION → ORPHAN / STUDENT

TEACHER → CHILD

The common denominator is therefore not gender alone. It is the possession of institutional authority over a dependent person.

This is why modernization did not automatically eliminate the problem. Modernization changed technology, administration and geography, but it did not eliminate unequal authority. The Catholic Church could establish sophisticated reporting procedures while retaining hierarchical structures. It could create centralized tribunals while maintaining confidentiality. It could expand safeguarding while preserving powerful religious orders. It could operate schools and hospitals according to modern professional standards while retaining clerical authority within them.

The result was an institutional contradiction. Modern Catholicism became increasingly international and administratively complex, but the underlying system remained capable of concentrating power. The more extensive the network became, the greater the potential consequences when information was not transmitted properly between institutions. A priest who had become problematic in one place could potentially move to another. A religious order could operate across national borders. A school could depend upon the authority of a religious organization. A seminarian could remain dependent upon superiors who controlled his future.

This is why our investigation places such importance on **transfer**. Transfer is not automatically concealment. A legitimate administrative reassignment can have nothing to do with abuse. But when an institution knows of allegations and moves the accused person without adequately protecting the receiving community, transfer becomes part of an institutional protection mechanism. The material identifies documented cases in which accused clergy were moved between parishes, dioceses and countries and in which receiving communities were not adequately informed.

The modern international Church therefore created an environment in which local decisions could have international consequences. The institutional network itself provided mobility. Religious orders, missions, seminaries and dioceses could connect countries that were thousands of kilometers apart. If information traveled with the accused person, the network could protect communities. If information did not travel, the same network could unintentionally—or in some documented cases deliberately—facilitate continued access to vulnerable people.

The central historical transition is therefore not **medieval Church → modern Church → disappearance of old problems**. It is:

MEDIEVAL ENCLOSURE
→ MODERN INSTITUTIONAL EXPANSION

→ INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS NETWORKS
→ GREATER ACCESS TO VULNERABLE PEOPLE
→ GREATER MOBILITY OF PERSONNEL
→ GREATER IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION CONTROL

The modern Church became larger, but size did not necessarily mean transparency. In some respects, expansion made transparency more important than ever.

This is also where money and prestige enter the institutional picture. The material identifies financial power as one of the recurring mechanisms alongside charismatic authority, spiritual authority, secrecy, influential patrons and jurisdictional separation. Maciel's fundraising empire demonstrates how a religious organization could combine money with schools, seminaries, political connections and papal access. Marcinkus represents another form of financial power through the IOR. These financial structures are not themselves proof of sexual abuse, but they become relevant when examining why powerful institutions and individuals could acquire influence and protection.

The result is a modern institutional system in which several kinds of power can reinforce one another:

SPIRITUAL POWER + ORGANIZATIONAL POWER + FINANCIAL POWER + POLITICAL CONNECTIONS + PAPAL ACCESS + INFORMATION CONTROL

The Maciel case provides the clearest example in the material of these forces converging around one individual. He was not simply a parish priest accused by one victim. He stood at the center of a large organization with schools, seminaries, religious houses, fundraising capacity and direct access to the highest levels of Catholic authority. That is precisely why his case becomes so important later in this book. It demonstrates how the ancient problem of concentrated religious authority could acquire a modern institutional scale.

The modernization of the Church therefore produced neither a simple continuation nor a complete break with the past. The medieval convent, the modern seminary and the international religious order are historically different institutions. But they can share a fundamental characteristic: people placed within them may become dependent upon authorities who control their religious environment and possess significant influence over what happens when misconduct is alleged.

That is the continuity we can establish without inventing a secret two-thousand-year organization. Our material does not prove that one uninterrupted abuse network survived from ancient Rome through medieval Christianity into the twentieth-century Vatican. It does show recurring institutional environments in which **hierarchy, dependency, secrecy,**

restricted outside oversight and concentrated authority could make sexual exploitation difficult to expose.

By the twentieth century, the stakes had become much larger. Catholic institutions were no longer confined to monasteries and convents. They reached children in schools and orphanages, young men in seminaries, adults in religious communities, patients in hospitals, families through parishes and vulnerable people through charitable organizations. The Church had become a worldwide institutional network capable of carrying both protection and risk across borders.

And with that expansion came the central problem that will dominate the modern portion of this book: **when abuse occurred, where did responsibility stop?** Did it belong to the individual perpetrator? To the immediate superior? To the bishop? To the religious order? To a national episcopate? To a Vatican office? Or, when information moved upward through the hierarchy, did responsibility become distributed so widely that no single authority appeared responsible?

The investigation that follows will show that this question cannot be answered by looking at perpetrators alone. We must follow the information, the transfers, the institutional relationships, the money and the authority surrounding them. Because by the modern period, the Catholic Church had become not merely a collection of priests and parishes but a vast interconnected system.

The old mechanisms had not disappeared. **They had been scaled up.**

By the time the historical material is placed beside the modern cases, a recurring architecture begins to emerge. It is not necessary to assume that every case was directed from one central office, nor does the material establish that every Catholic institution behaved in the same way. What the investigation does show is that very different cases repeatedly contain similar structural elements: a person with unusual authority gains access to vulnerable people; those people become dependent upon the institution or its representatives; allegations remain within ecclesiastical structures; institutional reputation becomes an important consideration; influential individuals can provide protection; personnel can be moved between institutions; and accountability can arrive only after years or decades.

The first element is the **predator**. In some cases the perpetrator appears as an ordinary priest or religious official; in others he possesses exceptional status. Marcial Maciel is the clearest example of the second category. He was not simply a priest working in an isolated parish. He was the founder of the Legion of Christ and Regnum Christi and stood at the center of a large organization containing seminaries, schools, universities, religious houses, charities, educational centers, oratories and chapels. The material identifies

more than 200 victims by the time of its source publication and describes Maciel's organization as extending across an enormous institutional network.

The importance of such a figure is that the abuse cannot be understood separately from the authority surrounding the perpetrator. A powerful religious figure may possess a reputation for holiness, leadership, scholarship, fundraising, missionary achievement or spiritual importance. That reputation can influence how accusations are received. The accusation does not arrive against an anonymous individual; it arrives against someone whom other people may regard as indispensable to a successful religious institution.

This is the second element: **spiritual and institutional authority**.

The investigation found this particularly strongly in the cases involving religious women. The Sant'Ambrogio scandal demonstrates the intersection of sexual relationships, spiritual authority, confession, supernatural claims, institutional hierarchy and religious obedience within a closed female community. The modern Rupnik case provides another form of the same mechanism: allegations involving adult women, predominantly former nuns, in which spiritual authority and alleged sexual, psychological and religious manipulation became intertwined. The material specifically identifies the alleged sequence as:

spiritual authority → manipulation → conscience → religious justification → sexual exploitation.

This matters because sexual abuse within religious institutions cannot always be reduced to physical force. The authority of the perpetrator can itself become part of the mechanism. A person who believes that a priest or spiritual superior has legitimate authority over her religious life may be especially vulnerable to manipulation. Religious obedience can be invoked. Sin can be invoked. The person's vocation can be invoked. The perpetrator can potentially make the victim question her own judgment while presenting his own conduct through the language of spirituality.

The third element is therefore **victim dependency**.

The investigation found this dependency in several different forms. Children may depend upon priests, teachers or religious institutions. Seminarians depend upon superiors responsible for their formation and future. Nuns may depend upon religious superiors and spiritual directors. Members of closed religious movements may depend upon founders and leadership structures. Orphans and students may depend upon Catholic institutions for education, accommodation and care. The material consequently identifies a broader system than the popular image of a male priest abusing a minor: clergy abuse, abuse by religious women, clergy abusing adult religious women, superiors abusing subordinate nuns, spiritual directors abusing dependent people,

institutions abusing or failing to protect orphans and students, teachers abusing children, and other forms of institutional vulnerability.

Dependency changes the meaning of an accusation. A person who is dependent upon the institution may have much more to lose by challenging the person exercising authority. A child may fear the priest. A seminarian may fear losing his vocation. A nun may fear expulsion or spiritual consequences. A member of a religious movement may fear separation from the only community he or she knows. The perpetrator therefore does not necessarily need to rely upon physical confinement. Institutional dependence can perform part of the same function.

The fourth element is **secrecy**.

Our investigation repeatedly encountered ecclesiastical structures in which allegations could remain inside the Church rather than immediately becoming matters for ordinary civil or criminal authorities. The material identifies confidentiality, canonical investigations, religious-order discipline, Vatican tribunals, records retention, settlements, non-disclosure agreements, defamation threats and institutional reputation as mechanisms that can affect what becomes publicly known. These mechanisms are not all equivalent, and confidentiality itself is not automatically evidence of criminal concealment. But together they establish why information control is central to understanding institutional abuse.

The distinction between different forms of concealment is particularly important. The investigation identified at least four different phenomena that are often collapsed into the single word "cover-up": **non-reporting**, in which the Church does not notify police; **internal containment**, in which the matter is handled inside ecclesiastical structures; **information suppression**, in which a receiving institution is not told about an accused person; and **active obstruction**, in which someone deliberately interferes with an investigation. These are different actions requiring different evidence.

This distinction allows us to describe institutional failure without automatically assigning the same degree of responsibility to everyone involved. An institution can fail to report a case without directly obstructing a police investigation. A receiving bishop can fail to receive important information without having participated in the original abuse. A superior can mishandle a complaint without being a perpetrator. Conversely, an individual who deliberately suppresses evidence or interferes with investigators carries a substantially different responsibility.

The fifth element is **protection**.

Protection can take several forms. The material identifies influential patrons, institutional usefulness, financial power, papal access and organizational

prestige as factors that can strengthen the position of a powerful cleric or religious organization. Maciel again provides the clearest example. His financial empire, fundraising success and institutional influence are explicitly connected in our material with his extraordinary longevity. His organization possessed schools, seminaries, religious houses, charities and substantial fundraising capacity, while Maciel himself maintained access to powerful figures.

The Vatican's own later description of the Maciel case is particularly important because it provides institutional confirmation of the mechanism. According to the material, the Holy See described Maciel's conduct as involving serious and objectively immoral acts, some constituting actual crimes, and described a system in which he obtained trust, familiarity and silence while people who questioned him could be discredited and pushed away. The Vatican itself therefore described a defensive mechanism that helped make Maciel effectively untouchable for years.

That is one of the strongest findings in the entire investigation because it moves the argument beyond an external accusation about Church behavior. The institution itself eventually acknowledged the existence of a mechanism involving **authority, trust, silence, discrediting and protection**. The Maciel case consequently provides a documented example of the architecture that the broader investigation had identified.

The sixth element is **institutional reputation**.

An accusation against a priest is also potentially an accusation against the institution that appointed, promoted, supported or publicly celebrated him. An accusation against the founder of a religious movement can threaten the movement itself. An accusation against a bishop or cardinal can damage the credibility of the hierarchy. And when an institution has schools, seminaries, charities, financial interests, political relationships or a powerful public reputation, exposure can have consequences far beyond the individual accused.

The material explicitly identifies reputation as one of the five variables repeatedly appearing across the major cases, together with institutional usefulness, charismatic authority, information control and victim dependency. A powerful person or organization may be considered valuable because of its political, financial, strategic or religious importance. Maciel represents the obvious example of institutional usefulness: his organization was extraordinarily successful, financially powerful and influential, while his personal reputation provided additional protection.

This creates a dangerous conflict of interests. The institution has an obligation to protect vulnerable people and establish the truth of allegations. At the same time, the institution has an interest in preserving its reputation, its

membership, its finances, its political relationships and its authority. When those interests collide, institutional loyalty can become an obstacle to accountability.

The seventh element is **mobility**.

A perpetrator does not necessarily remain in the same location throughout his career. Catholic institutions operate across dioceses, religious orders and countries. The material records cases in which accused clergy moved between organizational boundaries and identifies **143 priests with allegations in more than one diocese, eparchy or religious community**, representing 3.3 percent of priests with allegations in the relevant dataset.

Movement is not automatically concealment. A priest can be transferred for completely legitimate reasons. But when allegations are known and the receiving institution is not properly informed, geographic or institutional transfer can become part of the mechanism by which abuse continues. The investigation therefore treats mobility as a separate variable rather than automatically labeling every transfer a cover-up.

This is particularly important because the Catholic Church is an international organization. A problem in one parish does not necessarily remain within that parish. A priest can move between dioceses. A religious order can move personnel between countries. A seminarian can be transferred. An organization can operate schools, houses and missions across national boundaries. The wider the institutional network, the more important the transmission of information becomes.

The eighth element is **delayed accountability**.

The Maciel case is the extreme example. According to our material, allegations concerning him existed from the 1940s and 1950s, yet meaningful Vatican action occurred only decades later. The chronology records accusations reaching Mexican bishops and cardinals, a Vatican suspension in 1956, later rehabilitation, recognition of the Legion in 1965, and John Paul II's validation of its constitutional charter in 1983, before the eventual Vatican action against Maciel.

The significance is not merely the length of time. Delay can change the entire character of accountability. Witnesses age or die. Documents disappear. Memories weaken. Victims may stop reporting. Institutional reputations become established. The accused person may accumulate further authority. The organization may grow financially and politically. By the time formal action occurs, the institution may have become deeply invested in the person's continued success.

This is why **delayed accountability** is not simply the final stage of the sequence. It can reinforce every preceding stage.

The complete architecture can therefore be written as:

PREDATOR
↓
SPIRITUAL / INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY
↓
VICTIM DEPENDENCY
↓
SECRECY / INFORMATION CONTROL
↓
PROTECTION BY INSTITUTION OR INFLUENTIAL PATRONS
↓
INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION / USEFULNESS
↓
MOBILITY OR INTERNAL CONTAINMENT
↓
DELAYED ACCOUNTABILITY
↓
EVENTUAL EXPOSURE / INVESTIGATION / SANCTION

The important point is that this is not a claim that every case passes through every stage. The material itself demonstrates different outcomes. Maciel experienced a long period of protection and inaction followed eventually by Vatican sanction. McCarrick involved multiple levels of knowledge, delayed decisive action and eventual removal. Sodalitium involved local and long-running abuse followed by Vatican investigation, expulsion of its founder, dissolution of the organization and a reparation process. Rupnik involves allegations, complex institutional handling and continuing canonical proceedings.

That variation is essential. **The Vatican is not one unified behavioral actor.** Different periods and different people have produced different responses. The evidence includes institutional failure and institutional intervention. The Sodalitium case is especially important because it demonstrates that the Vatican can intervene against an abusive organization rather than simply protect it. Victims and journalists brought information forward; a local investigation developed; the Vatican became involved; the founder was expelled; the organization was dissolved; and a process of reparation followed.

Therefore the architecture cannot honestly be reduced to:

abuse → Vatican → cover-up.

The material supports a more complicated system:

abuse → information enters institution → institutional response → protection, delay, investigation, sanction, or some combination of these.

The crucial question is what determines the response.

The investigation identified five variables that repeatedly appear: **institutional usefulness, charismatic authority, information control, institutional reputation and victim dependency**. These variables help explain why apparently similar accusations can produce radically different outcomes. A powerful founder with enormous financial and organizational importance may be treated differently from an obscure priest. A charismatic cleric with direct access to senior officials may possess advantages unavailable to an ordinary parish priest. A victim who is economically, spiritually or institutionally dependent may have greater difficulty challenging an authority figure. And an organization whose reputation depends heavily upon a particular person may have greater incentives to resist damaging allegations.

Money forms an additional layer around this architecture. The investigation does not claim that money causes sexual abuse. Rather, financial power can strengthen institutional usefulness and influence. Maciel's fundraising empire is the clearest example. Marcinkus represents another form of financial power through the IOR and the wider Vatican financial network. These are not identical cases, and financial connection does not establish sexual misconduct. But money can determine who has access, prestige, influence and institutional importance.

Political and papal access can work similarly. A powerful cleric who can reach bishops, cardinals or popes does not thereby become protected from justice. But access increases the number of relationships through which his interests can be defended. In the Maciel case, our material specifically identifies direct papal access as one component of the institutional structure surrounding him.

The resulting system is therefore better understood as **two layers operating simultaneously**.

The first is the abuse chain:

VICTIM → PERPETRATOR → IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR → BISHOP / RELIGIOUS ORDER → VATICAN OFFICE → INTERNAL INVESTIGATION / TRANSFER / DISCIPLINE → EVENTUAL EXPOSURE → CIVIL OR CRIMINAL CASE.

The second is the surrounding power structure:

MONEY + POLITICAL INFLUENCE + PAPAL ACCESS + MEDIA INFLUENCE + INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION + VICTIM DEPENDENCY + RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY + INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS.

The two layers intersect. A perpetrator's position within the second layer can affect what happens in the first. A powerful person may have access to patrons. A wealthy organization may have greater institutional usefulness. A famous cleric may have greater credibility. A victim with little institutional power may have fewer avenues for complaint. An international organization may possess more opportunities for transfer.

This is why the investigation's central hypothesis is stronger than the simple statement that there was a single "Vatican sex ring." The material proposes that **certain Catholic institutional structures repeatedly created conditions in which abuse could continue: concentrated authority, spiritual dependency, secrecy, weak external oversight, geographic transfer, institutional loyalty and reputational incentives to suppress scandal**.

The difference is fundamental. A centralized criminal conspiracy would require evidence of centralized direction. The recurring institutional architecture requires something different: evidence that similar structural conditions repeatedly produced similar vulnerabilities and failures across different cases. Maciel, McCarrick, Sant'Ambrogio, Rupnik, Sodalitium, Bétharram and the cases involving abusive religious women provide different versions of the pattern. Some contain money; others do not. Some contain papal access; others do not. Some involve children; others involve adults. Some end in Vatican intervention; others demonstrate delayed or inadequate action.

The common denominator is therefore not a particular person or office. It is the interaction between **authority and dependency**, followed by the institutional handling of information about what occurred.

This also explains why the architecture extends beyond sexual abuse itself. The material identifies spiritual coercion, abuse of confession, manipulation of religious vows, sexual exploitation of nuns, abuse of seminarians, institutional intimidation, retaliation against complainants, financial dependency and manipulation of victims' understanding of sin and obedience. These mechanisms can operate before, during and after the sexual act.

The abuse system is therefore not simply a collection of sexual acts. It is a system of relationships. A perpetrator needs access. Access may come through religious authority. Authority creates dependency. Dependency can discourage resistance. Secrecy can prevent information from escaping. Institutional loyalty can protect reputation. Financial and political usefulness

can increase the value of protection. Mobility can move the problem elsewhere. And delay can allow all of these mechanisms to operate for years.

Eventually, however, the architecture can break. Victims speak. Journalists obtain documents. Lawyers bring cases. Police investigate. Internal investigators become involved. The media exposes contradictions. A bishop or Vatican official decides to act. A canonical process begins. An institution is sanctioned or dissolved. The same hierarchy that once possessed the capacity to contain information can become the mechanism through which accountability finally occurs.

That final possibility must remain part of the story. The investigation does not show an institution that has only ever concealed abuse. It shows an institution in which **failure, protection, secrecy, intervention, sanction and reform can all occur**, sometimes at different moments in the same case. The existence of later correction does not erase earlier failure; nor does earlier failure prove that every subsequent intervention is fraudulent.

The architecture we have uncovered is therefore neither a conspiracy diagram nor a claim that every Catholic institution is criminal. It is a recurring institutional pattern. The strength of the pattern comes precisely from its repetition across different people, countries, periods and forms of Catholic organization.

The historical sequence that began with religious authority and dependency has now reached the modern Church. The old structures have acquired international scale, financial power and sophisticated administrative machinery. But the underlying vulnerability remains recognizable: **when a person is entrusted with extraordinary spiritual authority over someone who depends upon him or her, the institution must possess an equally strong mechanism for independent accountability. Where that accountability is weak, secrecy, loyalty, reputation, money and hierarchy can transform individual abuse into institutional failure.**

This is the analytical key through which the following cases will be read. We will not simply ask whether a particular priest abused someone. We will follow the entire chain: **who had authority, who depended upon whom, who knew, who remained silent, who acted, who protected, who transferred, who investigated, how long accountability took, and what finally happened when the truth became impossible to contain.**

That is the recurring architecture of abuse revealed by our investigation. And it is the framework that will allow the individual names in the next chapters to become something more than a list of scandals: **they become separate windows into the same institutional problem.**

The Scale of the Problem

The modern history of Catholic sexual abuse cannot be understood through a handful of notorious names alone. By the time the Church's central authorities began systematically receiving and processing large numbers of abuse cases, the volume of information reaching Rome had already become enormous. The figures contained in our investigation demonstrate that what emerged was not an anecdotal collection of scandals but a vast body of allegations and disciplinary proceedings extending across dioceses, religious orders, countries and generations.

The decisive institutional change came in **2001**, when John Paul II's *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* placed clerical sexual abuse of minors under the reserved competence of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—the CDF. The change was communicated worldwide in a letter signed by Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone on 18 May 2001. From that point onward, the basic procedural chain became increasingly centralized: a local allegation could be investigated by a diocese or religious order, a credible case could be transmitted to the CDF in Rome, and Rome could determine how the canonical case would proceed and what form of canonical sanction would follow.

This transformation is fundamental to understanding the scale of the modern problem. Before 2001, local bishops and religious orders retained enormous practical discretion over personnel and abuse cases. After 2001, Rome became formally embedded in the management of the gravest cases involving minors. The Vatican therefore ceased to be merely a distant institution that might hear about particularly serious scandals. It became a central node through which a very large number of abuse cases passed.

The figures recorded in our material are striking. In **2012**, CDF Prefect William Levada stated that **more than 4,000 cases of sexual abuse of minors had been reported to the CDF during the preceding decade**, including allegations concerning crimes committed decades earlier. Another Vatican statement gave approximately **3,000 diocesan and religious priests whose cases were considered by the CDF between 2001 and 2010**. These figures demonstrate that thousands of cases had entered the central Vatican abuse-governance system within its first decade of operation.

There is, however, an essential distinction that must remain throughout this book: **a case is not automatically a proven crime, and an allegation is not automatically a conviction**. The material explicitly warns against equating the number of cases received by the Vatican with the number of proven child molesters. In a 2010 interview, Charles Scicluna, then the CDF official responsible for abuse cases, described approximately 3,000 cases

considered between 2001 and 2010 and characterized the underlying allegations in different categories. The terminology therefore matters: **case ≠ accusation ≠ substantiated abuse ≠ conviction**.

This distinction does not make the numbers insignificant. Quite the opposite. The fact that thousands of cases reached the Vatican's central abuse office is itself evidence of the enormous scale of the problem confronting the institution. The number tells us how many matters entered the canonical system; it does not tell us that every person named in those matters was guilty. A serious account must preserve both facts simultaneously.

Another figure contained in the investigation provides an even more specific measurement of the Vatican's disciplinary activity. According to the United Nations record incorporated into our material, between **2004 and 2013 there were 3,420 credible allegations against priests**, resulting in **848 dismissals from the clerical state and 2,572 other canonical disciplinary measures**. Again, these are not 3,420 proven rapes. They are allegations that the CDF confirmed as credible and that produced a large body of canonical disciplinary action.

The arithmetic itself is revealing. **848 priests were dismissed from the clerical state**, while **2,572 received lesser canonical disciplinary measures**. Together, those figures account for 3,420 disciplinary outcomes corresponding to the credible allegations recorded in that dataset. Whatever differences existed between the individual cases, the aggregate demonstrates that sexual-abuse cases had become a major component of the Vatican's disciplinary workload.

The scale also demonstrates why the modern abuse crisis cannot be reduced to individual parishes or individual countries. The investigation's chronology places Catholic abuse cases across multiple institutional settings and geographical areas. The wider material identifies cases involving dioceses, religious orders, seminaries, schools, orphanages and other Catholic organizations, while international personnel movement created connections between institutions in different countries. The result was a problem that crossed organizational boundaries as readily as it crossed national borders.

The American material provides one of the clearest demonstrations of this wider scale. The John Jay research covering **1950–2002** received information from **195 dioceses and eparchies**, representing approximately **97 percent of U.S. diocesan priests**, together with information from **142 religious communities**, representing approximately **64 percent of religious communities**. It identified **4,392 priests or deacons with allegations and 10,667 people making allegations**. The investigation records these figures specifically because they show that allegations were distributed across

essentially the entire American Catholic system rather than being confined to a handful of exceptional institutions.

The figures must again be read precisely. The John Jay numbers concern allegations recorded in the study; they do not establish that every allegation represented a criminal conviction or that every accused person was legally guilty. But they establish the scale of the documented allegation population. Thousands of people came forward, thousands of clergy were identified in connection with allegations, and the allegations extended across the institutional geography of American Catholicism.

The international dimension is equally important. Our investigation's central hypothesis specifically identifies the Catholic abuse crisis as extending across different countries and institutional settings. The recurring structural conditions identified in the material include **concentrated spiritual authority, dependence of victims, internal secrecy, hierarchical decision-making, institutional reputation, financial interests, mobility of clergy and religious personnel, and limited external oversight**.

These conditions matter because numbers alone cannot explain how a large abuse population interacts with an institution. If thousands of allegations arise in thousands of places, the crucial question becomes how the information travels. Does a complaint remain with the local parish? Does it reach a bishop? Does a religious order receive it? Does the Vatican receive it? Is the accused transferred? Does the receiving institution know about the allegation? Is the person removed from ministry? Is the matter reported to civil authorities? Or does the institution handle it internally?

The investigation therefore developed a network model to follow exactly this process:

VICTIM
↓
PERPETRATOR
↓
IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR
↓
BISHOP / RELIGIOUS ORDER
↓
VATICAN OFFICE
↓
INVESTIGATION / TRANSFER / SUPPRESSION / DISCIPLINE
↓
EVENTUAL EXPOSURE
↓
CIVIL / CRIMINAL CASE

Around this central chain sit the forces that can influence its operation: **money, political influence, papal access, media influence, institutional reputation, victim dependency and religious authority**.

The existence of this network does not mean that Rome directed every abuse case. The investigation makes an important distinction between a **criminal network**, an **institutional network** and a **hierarchical Vatican network**. The first consists of perpetrators and their victims. The second consists of dioceses, religious orders, schools, seminaries and religious houses moving personnel and information. The third consists of Rome's formal authority over canonical law, serious abuse cases, bishops, religious superiors, Vatican diplomats, disciplinary procedures, confidentiality and investigations. The three networks intersect, but their intersection does not automatically prove that the Vatican directed the first.

This distinction becomes particularly important when discussing Vatican responsibility. Our investigation established three possible levels. **Level 1 is direct participation**: a Vatican official personally abuses, facilitates, transfers, conceals or obstructs an investigation. That requires evidence concerning the individual. **Level 2 is institutional knowledge**: a Vatican office receives a case, file or report and therefore knows about an allegation. **Level 3 is structural responsibility**: the Vatican creates or maintains the system governing canonical discipline, bishops, religious superiors, secrecy, investigations and appointments.

The distinction allows the scale of the problem to be described without making an unsupported leap from "the Vatican received thousands of cases" to "the Vatican caused thousands of crimes." The first proposition is documented in our material. The second would require separate evidence. What can be said with confidence is that, after 2001, the Vatican possessed formal responsibility within the case-management chain for the gravest clerical sexual-abuse cases involving minors, and thousands of cases entered that system.

The historical significance of this development is considerable. For centuries, sexual misconduct could be handled primarily within local ecclesiastical structures. The modern system gradually became more centralized. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the CDF had become one of the most important institutional nodes in Catholic abuse governance. The same Church that had once handled many matters through local bishops and religious superiors was now receiving thousands of cases in Rome.

This creates a paradox. Centralization can increase accountability because serious cases are brought before a central authority with the power to impose canonical sanctions. But centralization also means that enormous amounts of sensitive information become concentrated inside a single institutional

system. The Vatican therefore became both a potential mechanism of correction and a powerful repository of confidential information.

The later record demonstrates both sides. The material identifies significant disciplinary action, including hundreds of dismissals and thousands of other canonical measures. It also identifies cases in which allegations were delayed, mishandled, concealed or followed by transfers. The investigation therefore does not present the Vatican as a single actor behaving identically in every period. It presents a system capable of **knowledge, intervention, failure, delay and correction**.

The Maciel chronology demonstrates why this distinction matters. Allegations concerning Marcial Maciel reached Mexican ecclesiastical authorities as early as the 1940s and 1950s, information about his drug dependency reached Rome, and he was suspended in 1956 before later being rehabilitated. Yet meaningful Vatican action against him came only decades later. The investigation describes this as a longitudinal institutional failure: Rome had warning signals about Maciel long before the full pattern of his conduct was formally recognized.

Maciel is therefore not merely one name among thousands. His case demonstrates how the institutional scale of the Catholic Church can interact with the individual power of a charismatic religious leader. His organization possessed money, prestige, seminaries, schools, religious houses and international connections. His position gave him access to influential people. And the Vatican's later investigation concluded that his crimes were supported by a relationship system involving trust, silence, loyalty and the discrediting of people who questioned him.

That mechanism is important because the enormous numbers do not exist independently of institutional structures. Thousands of allegations can remain a collection of separate cases unless information connects them. Once information moves through bishops, orders, dioceses, Vatican offices and receiving institutions, however, the cases become part of a wider institutional history.

Mobility provides one of the clearest examples. The John Jay research identified **143 priests with allegations in more than one diocese, eparchy or religious community**, representing 3.3 percent of priests with allegations in the relevant dataset. The investigation subsequently identified individual international-transfer cases involving figures such as Pinal, Aguilar Rivera, Contreras, Patrick Kelly, Oliver O'Brien, Ceniza, O'Loghlen and Smyth.

The Smyth case is particularly significant because the investigation found a documented sequence of **knowledge → transfer → later institutional denial**. The Rhode Island records indicate multiple complaints, an admission

by Smyth, a bishop's decision to have him returned to Ireland, communication with the Irish order, and decades later a diocesan public statement that was contradicted by its own records. This is exactly the type of case in which the numerical scale becomes meaningful: an individual allegation becomes part of a chain connecting institutions across countries and across time.

The same caution applies to the question of international transfers to Africa and Latin America. Our material does not establish a general Vatican policy of sending accused priests to those regions specifically to evade European or American courts. It identifies individual cases and a serious research direction, but insists that each transfer must be reconstructed individually: **accusation → international transfer → receiving institution → knowledge of accusation → continued ministry**. This distinction prevents a legitimate pattern of mobility from being inflated into an unsupported universal claim.

The numbers from Italy provide another indication of the wider population. The investigation records **4,395 identified priest-abuse victims in Italy**, corresponding to approximately **74.5 victims per million inhabitants**, with 1,106 alleged perpetrators among roughly 40,000 priests. But the material explicitly warns against converting this figure into a worldwide victim count. Applying the Italian rate to the Christian population would produce a mathematical scenario of approximately 171,000 victim-equivalents, but that is an extrapolation, not an estimate of the actual worldwide number of victims.

This limitation is not a weakness. It is necessary if the scale of the crisis is to be presented honestly. Sexual abuse is substantially underreported, and reporting practices differ enormously between countries. The available material does not provide a defensible worldwide multiplier. We can therefore document the numbers that exist without pretending to know the number of victims who remain unknown.

What the documented figures already establish is sufficiently serious. In the United States alone, the John Jay study identified **10,667 people making allegations and 4,392 priests or deacons with allegations** across a research population encompassing almost the entire diocesan system. In Rome, thousands of cases reached the CDF after centralization. Between 2004 and 2013, the material records **3,420 credible allegations**, followed by **848 dismissals and 2,572 lesser canonical sanctions**. In Italy, thousands of victims have been identified in the available statistical material. These are not isolated anecdotes.

The international pattern is equally unmistakable. The investigation's chronology encompasses the United States, Ireland, Mexico, Italy, the Philippines, Australia and other countries, while the wider Catholic institutional structure extended across continents. Personnel could move.

Religious organizations could operate internationally. Information could be transmitted—or fail to be transmitted—between institutions. The abuse problem therefore acquired a geographical scale corresponding to the worldwide structure of Catholicism itself.

This is the point at which the historical story becomes an institutional one. The Church's problem was not simply that some priests committed sexual crimes. The modern Church had to deal with **thousands of allegations, thousands of cases, hundreds of dismissals, thousands of lesser sanctions, multiple institutional levels, international personnel movement and enormous quantities of confidential information**.

And that creates the central problem for the chapters that follow: **what did the Church do with what it knew?**

The scale of the cases establishes the existence of a vast institutional workload. It does not by itself establish how every case was handled. To understand that, we must move from statistics to the individual names and institutional histories through which the system becomes visible.

That is why the next chapter begins with Marcial Maciel. His case contains almost every element that the modern investigation has identified: **victims, a predator, a powerful religious organization, money, institutional prestige, bishops, papal access, accusations, Vatican knowledge, delayed action and eventual institutional consequences**. His story provides the clearest starting point for understanding how a single powerful cleric could become embedded within the wider Catholic system—and how long it could take before that system finally acted.

Marcial Maciel

Marcial Maciel Degollado is the first great modern case in this book because his story brings together almost every element of the institutional abuse system identified in our investigation. He was the founder of the **Legion of Christ** and later **Regnum Christi**, a Mexican priest whose religious organization grew into an enormous international institution. Around Maciel there developed a combination of spiritual authority, personal loyalty, recruitment of young seminarians, financial power, institutional prestige, internal control and access to senior figures within the Catholic hierarchy. The result was not simply the story of an individual accused of sexual abuse. It was the story of a powerful religious founder whose alleged and eventually acknowledged misconduct existed alongside an organization that became increasingly influential within the Church.

Maciel was born in 1920 in Cotija de la Paz, Mexico, and was ordained a priest in 1944, around the period in which he founded the Legion of Christ. The organization was initially treated with suspicion in both Mexico and the Vatican because of what was described in our material as its almost sectarian character. Yet Maciel proved extraordinarily effective at building an organization. Within a relatively short period he had established an expanding network of schools, universities and charitable institutions, and in 1959 he founded Regnum Christi as the secular branch associated with the Legion. His ability to recruit, organize and raise money would become one of the foundations of his extraordinary influence.

The Legion's growth eventually reached an extraordinary scale. Our investigation records that at the height of Maciel's organization it included **15 universities, 50 seminaries and institutes, 177 middle schools, 34 schools for disadvantaged children, 125 religious houses, 200 educational centres and approximately 1,200 oratories and chapels**, in addition to charitable associations. This scale is essential to understanding why the Maciel case belongs at the beginning of the modern abuse history. He did not operate as an isolated parish priest with limited institutional reach. He stood at the center of an international organization possessing thousands of seminarians and a very large population of young people passing through its schools, seminaries and religious institutions.

The allegations against Maciel concern sexual abuse of boys and seminarians and extend back to the **1940s and 1950s**. Our material states that former seminarians accused him of sexual abuse and that more than **200 victims** had been identified by the time of the source's publication. The allegations were not confined to one period late in his life. According to the material, the first instances of sexual abuse dated to the 1940s and 1950s and were communicated to Mexican bishops and cardinals at that time. Information concerning Maciel's severe substance addiction also reached Rome. In 1956, Maciel was suspended by the Vatican on the orders of Cardinal Valerio Valeri.

That chronology is one of the most important facts in the case. It means that the story cannot accurately be reduced to a scandal suddenly discovered near the end of Maciel's life. Allegations and warnings existed much earlier. His superiors had already encountered troubling circumstances relating to sexuality; accusations had reached Mexican ecclesiastical authorities; information had reached Rome; and the Vatican had taken action against him in 1956. Yet this did not end his career.

Instead, Maciel returned to positions of extraordinary influence. The material states that Cardinal Clemente Micara later pardoned him in 1958. In 1965, Pope Paul VI formally recognized the Legion of Christ, and in 1983 John Paul II validated its constitutional charter. Thus, within the chronology recorded in

our investigation, an individual against whom serious allegations had existed decades earlier went from Vatican suspension to the leadership of an organization that ultimately became one of the most powerful and financially successful movements within modern Catholicism.

This is the first major institutional contradiction in the Maciel story. The organization was increasingly successful at precisely the time that troubling allegations concerning its founder persisted. Recruitment, fundraising and institutional expansion created an extraordinarily successful religious enterprise. Success itself consequently became one of the factors that must be examined when understanding why Maciel remained powerful.

Our material identifies this directly as **the blindness that can come from success**. The Legion's recruitment of seminarians was impressive, its financial revenue was vast and its organizational efficiency attracted admiration within the Vatican. During John Paul II's first visit to Mexico in 1979, Maciel demonstrated his organizational abilities, political and media connections and ability to manage an enormous operation. The investigation records that John Paul II was impressed by the Legion's recruitment and organization and subsequently received Maciel repeatedly as a favored figure.

This relationship with John Paul II is central to the institutional story, but it must be described precisely. Our material establishes the Pope's positive relationship with Maciel and records enthusiastic public messages toward him late in Maciel's career. It does **not** establish that John Paul II knew the full extent of Maciel's crimes. That distinction is essential. The documented fact is that the Pope continued publicly supporting and honoring Maciel while accusations already existed within the Vatican system. The question of exactly what John Paul II knew, when he knew it and how he interpreted the information belongs to the institutional history of the case.

Maciel's power did not rest on papal access alone. It was reinforced by the internal structure of the Legion itself. According to the material, seminarians took vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and Maciel added a further **vow of silence** prohibiting criticism of superiors. Members were expected to bring complaints to their superiors rather than speak outside the Legion. This created a system in which the organization could regulate not only the religious lives of its members but also the channels through which criticism could travel.

The material describes an extensive internal surveillance system. Correspondence was read, telephone calls were monitored and friendships were scrutinized. Maciel selected favored seminarians and surrounded himself with young recruits. The system therefore combined spiritual authority with physical proximity and information control. The resulting formula is one of the

clearest expressions of the institutional mechanism examined throughout this book:

VICTIM DEPENDENCY + INFORMATION CONTROL + SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY + PHYSICAL PROXIMITY

That combination is more important than the simple statement that Maciel was a sexual predator. A predator operating inside an institution has opportunities that an isolated offender does not. Maciel could influence the environment in which young seminarians lived, the people around them, their relationships, their religious formation and the information that could leave the organization. A person who had spent years inside the Legion could also find the outside world increasingly difficult to imagine.

The testimony of former Legionary Juan Vaca illustrates the depth of this dependency. According to the material, Vaca attempted to write an account of his life in the Legion, including the sexual abuse, intending to bring it to the attention of a Mexican bishop. He believed his room had been searched and subsequently found himself sent away to teach in Spain. He later described remaining within the Legion for years because he did not know how to leave. After more than two decades away from his family, religious life was effectively the only world he knew.

The same testimony also reveals how the organization's recruitment structure could become relevant to abuse. Vaca recalled receiving instructions from Maciel to recruit the "prettiest and smartest kids." He subsequently encountered four boys who complained to him that their rector was touching them. Vaca said he immediately telephoned Maciel, who ordered the rector removed. The rector, according to Vaca's account, had himself been abused by Maciel as a boy and was subsequently transferred.

This episode is significant because it shows that the problem within the Legion was not simply a theoretical possibility. Allegations could involve more than one generation of members, while authority over the response remained concentrated within the same organizational hierarchy. The case also illustrates the importance of distinguishing individual acts from institutional response. The evidence concerning any particular perpetrator must be evaluated individually, but the organizational environment could determine what happened after a complaint was made.

Maciel's financial power strengthened that environment. The Legion developed a fundraising operation described in the material as generating funds in the tens of millions. The organization became a model of Catholic fundraising and new evangelization, precisely the characteristics that made it attractive to influential Catholic figures. Financial success provided resources for expansion, schools, seminaries and charitable institutions, while

organizational success increased Maciel's usefulness to a Church seeking new vocations and international influence.

This produces another important chain:

RECRUITMENT → SEMINARIES → EXPANSION → FUNDRAISING → INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS → INFLUENCE

The same organization that provided access to young seminarians therefore also generated money, prestige and institutional importance. Maciel's personal position became increasingly difficult to separate from the success of the Legion itself. Attacking Maciel could therefore appear, within the institutional logic of the organization, to threaten something much larger than one priest.

This is where the protection mechanism becomes visible. Our material describes five major factors behind Maciel's extraordinary longevity: the blindness produced by success, ideological proximity between Maciel and John Paul II, the importance of his anti-communist orientation, the financial resources associated with his organization and the personal relationships that surrounded him. The investigation therefore does not explain Maciel's longevity solely through personal deception. It identifies an environment in which his success, ideology, money, organizational usefulness and access to powerful figures could reinforce his position.

The Vatican's later findings make this institutional interpretation even stronger. The 2010 apostolic visitation of the Legionaries of Christ concluded that Maciel's conduct had been confirmed by **"incontrovertible testimonies"** and that some of his conduct constituted real crimes. More importantly, the Vatican described the mechanism surrounding him: Maciel created relationships that generated trust; he cultivated silence; people who questioned him were discredited or distanced; and concern about damage to the Legion's reputation contributed to a defensive mechanism.

This is effectively the architecture identified throughout our investigation:

CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

- **INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS**
- **LOYALTY**
- **SILENCE / INTIMIDATION**
- **DIScrediting of challengers**
- **REPUTATION PROTECTION**
  = PREDATOR INSULATION

The importance of this finding cannot be overstated. It means that the institutional explanation does not depend entirely upon outside interpretation. The Vatican itself eventually described a system in which trust, silence, discrediting and concern for institutional reputation helped make Maciel extraordinarily difficult to challenge. The problem was therefore not merely the existence of a predatory individual. It was the relationship between the individual and the institution that surrounded him.

The Vatican's own chronology also establishes a direct chain of case-management. Beginning in **1998**, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith received accusations against Maciel concerning offenses reserved to its competence. In **2001**, the new centralized framework for serious abuse cases was already in force. Joseph Ratzinger authorized an investigation. After the investigation, the CDF decided not to conduct a canonical trial and instead ordered Maciel to a reserved life of prayer and penance and removed him from public ministry. Benedict XVI approved the decision.

The chain is therefore documented:

ACCUSATIONS → CDF / ROME → RATZINGER AUTHORIZES INVESTIGATION → INVESTIGATION → ROME DECIDES → NO CANONICAL TRIAL → PRIVATE PENANCE → REMOVAL FROM PUBLIC MINISTRY

This is direct evidence of Vatican case-management. It is different from speculation about what Rome might have known. The documentation establishes that accusations reached the CDF, that an investigation was authorized and that the Vatican ultimately imposed canonical restrictions.

The timing is particularly important. Joseph Ratzinger was the Vatican official who authorized the investigation while still Prefect of the CDF and later became Pope Benedict XVI. In 2005, after John Paul II's death, Ratzinger became Pope; in 2006, the Vatican announced sanctions against Maciel. This chronology makes Ratzinger's role an important part of the institutional history: the same Vatican authority that had received the allegations and investigated them eventually imposed sanctions.

The case also demonstrates the limits of canonical accountability. Maciel was not subjected to an ordinary criminal trial through the Vatican's canonical process. He was removed from public ministry and ordered into a life of prayer and penance. The distinction between canonical punishment and criminal prosecution is therefore essential to understanding what happened. **Canonical sanction is not the same thing as criminal conviction.**

Maciel died in 2008. In 2009, Benedict XVI ordered an investigation into the organizations connected with the Legion of Christ and Regnum Christi. Five bishops conducted a visitation covering five continents. Their conclusions

were communicated confidentially to the Pope in 2010, and the Vatican subsequently acknowledged Maciel's objectively immoral acts and real crimes. The Legion itself was subjected to profound institutional reassessment.

The significance of this final stage is that the Vatican eventually moved from treating the problem as an individual matter to confronting the organization built around the individual. That transition is important. If Maciel alone had been removed while the institutional mechanisms surrounding him remained untouched, the deeper problem would have survived. Instead, the Vatican visitation concluded that his personal system had affected the life and structure of the Legion itself.

The Maciel case therefore contains nearly the complete model developed in this book:

PREDATOR — Marcial Maciel
VICTIMS — former seminarians and others, with more than 200 identified in the material
AUTHORITY — founder and religious superior
DEPENDENCY — seminarians and members of the Legion
ACCESS — seminaries, schools and religious houses
CONTROL — surveillance, obedience and vow of silence
MONEY — enormous fundraising capacity
PRESTIGE — international institutional success
PAPAL ACCESS — repeated contact with senior Vatican figures and John Paul II
VATICAN KNOWLEDGE — allegations reaching Rome decades before final sanctions
DELAY — decades between early allegations and decisive action
INVESTIGATION — CDF investigation
SANCTION — removal from public ministry and later institutional intervention.

But one final distinction must remain. The evidence concerning Maciel is exceptionally strong within our investigation, yet not every person connected with the Legion can therefore be described as participating in abuse or concealment. The material explicitly warns against collapsing everyone in the network into one category. Some individuals were perpetrators; others were victims; others were institutional superiors; others were witnesses; others were merely connected to the organization. The purpose of reconstructing the network is precisely to determine these differences rather than erase them.

Maciel is therefore the ideal starting point for the modern section not simply because he was a notorious predator. He is important because his career demonstrates how **sexual abuse, religious authority, organizational**

success, money, recruitment, institutional loyalty, information control and Vatican access could exist within the same system for decades.

His story establishes the first major modern lesson of this book: a powerful religious organization can become simultaneously a place of genuine institutional activity and a structure capable of protecting the authority of its founder. When allegations threaten that authority, the question is no longer merely whether the accusations are true. It becomes a question of what the organization does with the information, how much influence the accused person possesses, who is willing to challenge him, and how long the institution can continue to function as though nothing has happened.

In Maciel's case, the answer took decades to emerge. By the time the Vatican finally acknowledged the seriousness of his conduct, the organization he had built had become an international empire. That is what makes his story the first great modern case: **the predator did not stand outside the institution. He stood at its center.**

The significance of Marcial Maciel's case lies not only in the allegations against him, but in what happened **around him after complaints existed**. The material assembled in our investigation shows a striking chronology: allegations of sexual misconduct reached Mexican bishops and cardinals as early as the 1940s and 1950s; information concerning Maciel's drug dependency reached Rome; the Vatican suspended him in 1956; yet he was subsequently rehabilitated, his religious organization continued to expand, and he eventually became one of the most influential and financially successful religious founders in the modern Catholic Church. The central question is therefore not simply how Maciel could abuse seminarians, but how a man surrounded by allegations could simultaneously become more powerful.

The first part of the answer lies in the organization Maciel built around himself. He did not remain an ordinary priest whose influence was limited to one parish. The Legion of Christ became an enormous institutional structure containing seminaries, schools, universities, religious houses, charitable organizations, educational centres, oratories and chapels. At its height, the material records **15 universities, 50 seminaries and institutes, 177 middle schools, 34 schools for disadvantaged children, 125 religious houses, 200 educational centres and approximately 1,200 oratories and chapels**. Thousands of seminarians were connected to the organization. Maciel therefore occupied the center of a system that possessed both a large population of young people and enormous organizational resources.

The institutional success of the Legion was itself part of Maciel's protection. His organization produced vocations, expanded Catholic education and generated substantial fundraising. The material explicitly identifies his **fundraising empire, fundraising success and institutional influence** as

factors connected with his extraordinary longevity. Success could therefore obscure danger. The more successful the organization appeared to be, the more difficult it could become for allegations against its founder to be understood as a threat to the institution rather than merely a personal accusation against one priest.

Maciel also cultivated a powerful personal image. The investigation describes him as possessing charismatic authority and extraordinary organizational ability. John Paul II met him in Mexico in 1979, was impressed by the Legion's recruitment and organization, and subsequently received him repeatedly as a favored figure. The Vatican archive material contained in our investigation records enthusiastic public messages from John Paul II to Maciel as late as **2004 and 2005**, including public praise for Maciel's sixtieth anniversary of priestly ordination and a special greeting to him in January 2005. This does not establish that John Paul II knew the full extent of Maciel's crimes, but it does establish that the Pope continued publicly supporting him extremely late in his career while accusations were already within the Vatican system.

The protection network therefore cannot be understood simply as a secret agreement between named individuals. The stronger evidence concerns the way Maciel's **authority, institutional success, personal relationships and organizational usefulness** reinforced one another. He had a successful religious movement. He raised enormous amounts of money. He produced new vocations. He possessed schools and seminaries. He cultivated relationships with senior Church figures. The organization itself became an important Catholic institution. Each of these factors increased the cost of challenging its founder.

Inside the Legion, the structure of obedience added another layer. The material describes seminarians taking vows of **chastity, poverty and obedience**, while Maciel added a further **vow of silence** prohibiting criticism of superiors. Members were expected to bring complaints to their superiors rather than speak outside the organization. The result was an institutional environment in which religious obedience was combined with restrictions on criticism and control over the channels through which information could leave the organization.

The investigation also records allegations of extensive internal surveillance. According to the material, Maciel's system involved reading correspondence, monitoring telephone calls, scrutinizing friendships and selecting favored seminarians. This created a particularly powerful combination:

seminarians → obedience → secrecy → surveillance → dependence → charismatic founder.

The importance of this mechanism is that it helps explain why complaints did not necessarily translate immediately into public accusations. A person living inside a religious organization may depend upon that organization for education, accommodation, friendships, vocation and future. If criticism is prohibited and communications are monitored, the ordinary avenues through which a complaint might reach the outside world become considerably narrower.

The testimony concerning former Legionary Juan Vaca illustrates this dependence. According to the material, Vaca attempted to write an account of his life in the Legion, including sexual abuse, intending to bring it to a Mexican bishop. He believed his room had been searched and subsequently found himself sent away to teach in Spain. He later described remaining within the Legion because he did not know how to leave. After more than two decades away from his family, religious life had effectively become the only world he knew.

Vaca's account also shows how the institutional environment could reproduce itself. He recalled receiving instructions from Maciel to recruit the "prettiest and smartest kids." Later, four boys complained to Vaca that their rector was touching them. Vaca said he immediately telephoned Maciel, who ordered the rector removed. According to the testimony recorded in the material, that rector had himself been abused by Maciel as a boy and was subsequently transferred. The case therefore illustrates how the same organization could contain victims, alleged perpetrators, superiors and mechanisms for internal response simultaneously.

But the most revealing element of the protection mechanism comes from the Vatican's own later description of Maciel. The **2010 apostolic visitation** of the Legionaries of Christ concluded that his conduct had been confirmed by "incontrovertible testimonies" and that some of his conduct constituted actual crimes. More importantly for our investigation, the Vatican described the system surrounding him: Maciel created relationships that generated **trust and familiarity**; he cultivated **silence**; people who questioned him could be **discredited or distanced**; and concern about damaging the Legion's reputation helped create a **defensive mechanism**.

This is the central finding of the Maciel protection network. It was not necessary for every person around him to know everything. The system could function through loyalty, trust and institutional confidence. Those who believed in the founder could defend him because they trusted him. Those who depended upon the organization could remain silent because their entire religious world was connected to it. Those who challenged him could be discredited or pushed away. And the organization itself had an interest in avoiding damage to its reputation.

The mechanism can therefore be reconstructed as:

MACIEL'S AUTHORITY
↓
TRUST IN THE FOUNDER
↓
LEGION'S SUCCESS
↓
FINANCIAL AND VOCATIONAL IMPORTANCE
↓
LOYALTY TO THE ORGANIZATION
↓
SILENCE
↓
DIScrediting / DISTANCING OF CHALLENGERS
↓
PROTECTION OF INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION
↓
DELAYED ACCOUNTABILITY

This is more significant than simply saying that Maciel was a manipulator. It explains why accusations could exist without immediately destroying his position. The institution around him was not neutral. It possessed enormous reasons to preserve confidence in its founder. The more successful Maciel became, the more deeply his personal reputation became connected to the reputation of the Legion itself.

The chronology demonstrates how extraordinary the delay was. Allegations existed in the 1940s and 1950s. Maciel was suspended by the Vatican in **1956**. Yet Cardinal Clemente Micara subsequently pardoned him; Pope Paul VI formally recognized the Legion in **1965**; and John Paul II validated its constitutional charter in **1983**. The man who had already faced serious allegations decades earlier therefore continued to lead an organization that became increasingly legitimate and influential within the Church.

The 1956 suspension is especially important because it establishes that the Vatican's relationship with Maciel cannot be described simply as ignorance until the 1990s. The material explicitly emphasizes that this earlier history destroys a simplistic chronology in which Rome discovered Maciel only near the end of his life. The Maciel file existed decades earlier. The difficult question is what happened to the information after it existed.

That question brings us to institutional resistance. The material records that Vatican documentation concerning allegations existed from the 1950s, that former seminarians formally complained, that the case languished, and that powerful Vatican figures—including Cardinal Angelo Sodano—opposed

investigation. It then records that only after Ratzinger became Pope was Maciel subjected to a Vatican investigation and sanction.

This creates a particularly clear chronology:

1940s–1950s
Allegations reach Mexican bishops and cardinals.

1956
Maciel is suspended by the Vatican.

1958
He is subsequently pardoned according to the material.

1965
Paul VI formally recognizes the Legion.

1979–2005
Maciel develops a close relationship with John Paul II and remains institutionally successful.

1998
The CDF receives accusations concerning Maciel.

2001–2005
The Vatican investigation proceeds under the centralized abuse framework.

2005
Ratzinger becomes Pope.

2006
The CDF announces sanctions against Maciel.

2010
The apostolic visitation describes his conduct and the defensive system surrounding him.

The chronology makes the central problem impossible to avoid: **the existence of allegations and the existence of institutional success occurred simultaneously for decades.**

The 1998 stage is particularly important because it gives us direct evidence of Vatican case-management. According to the Vatican's 2006 statement, beginning in 1998 the CDF received accusations against Maciel concerning offenses reserved to its competence. Ratzinger authorized an investigation. After the investigation, the CDF decided not to conduct a canonical trial; instead Maciel was ordered to a reserved life of prayer and penance and removed from public ministry. Benedict XVI approved the decision.

That sequence proves something very specific: **the Vatican eventually received the accusations, investigated Maciel and imposed canonical**

sanctions. It does not prove that every Vatican official knew everything earlier, nor does it prove that every person who supported Maciel was aware of his crimes. The evidentiary categories must remain separate.

What it does demonstrate is that institutional action was possible once the case was formally processed at the appropriate Vatican level. The harder question is why decisive action took so long, particularly given the earlier history of complaints and the 1956 suspension.

This is where institutional reputation becomes central. The Legion had become too large to be regarded merely as Maciel's personal project. It represented schools, seminaries, universities, religious houses, charitable institutions, donors, priests, seminarians and lay members. An attack on Maciel's credibility could therefore threaten confidence in an entire religious organization.

The Vatican's later language directly addresses this point. The 2010 visitation described concern about damage to the Legion's good reputation as contributing to the defensive mechanism around Maciel. In other words, protecting the organization and protecting its founder could become mutually reinforcing objectives. If Maciel's credibility protected the Legion's reputation, then defending Maciel could appear to be a way of defending the institution itself.

This produces the **mutual-protection loop**:

PROTECT THE FOUNDER → PROTECT THE ORGANIZATION → PROTECT ITS REPUTATION → PRESERVE CONFIDENCE → PROTECT THE FOUNDER

Money strengthened this loop. The material explicitly connects Maciel's financial empire and fundraising success with his extraordinary longevity. Financial power does not prove sexual abuse, and money does not by itself demonstrate a cover-up. But an organization generating enormous financial resources and producing substantial institutional growth becomes more valuable to the institution surrounding it. Its founder's success becomes part of the organization's success.

The same applies to vocations. The Legion's ability to recruit seminarians was one of the characteristics that impressed John Paul II. Maciel was therefore useful not merely as a fundraiser but as a builder of Catholic personnel and institutions. His organization could be presented as a successful response to the Church's need for vocations, education and expansion. Institutional usefulness could consequently operate alongside personal charisma.

This is why the Maciel case demonstrates **predator insulation** so clearly:

charismatic authority + institutional success + loyalty + intimidation/discrediting + reputation protection = predator insulation.

The word "insulation" is important. The evidence does not require us to imagine that every person surrounding Maciel actively participated in protecting him. An institutional system can insulate a powerful individual through many smaller actions and assumptions: trusting the founder, doubting accusers, maintaining silence, discouraging criticism, emphasizing the organization's achievements, accepting his explanations, avoiding damaging publicity or simply assuming that someone else has investigated the matter.

This is why the discrediting of accusers matters so much. Once a founder is treated as unquestionably trustworthy, an accusation against him can be psychologically inverted. Instead of asking first whether the accusation deserves investigation, members may ask what is wrong with the person making it. The Vatican's later description that people who questioned Maciel were discredited or distanced is therefore one of the strongest pieces of evidence in the entire case. It describes a system in which challenging the founder could itself become grounds for marginalization.

The consequence is a reversal of institutional priorities. The person raising the alarm becomes a problem for the organization, while the person accused remains the organization's indispensable leader. Once that reversal occurs, the institution can begin protecting itself by protecting the person who represents it.

This also explains why delayed accountability can become self-perpetuating. Every year of continued success strengthens the reputation that makes the accusations harder to believe. Every new school, seminarian, donation, papal audience or institutional achievement adds another reason to trust the founder. The longer the system survives without decisive action, the more deeply the founder becomes embedded within it.

Maciel's relationship with John Paul II illustrates this phenomenon without allowing us to make claims the evidence does not support. The material establishes repeated meetings, papal praise and John Paul II's continuing support. It also establishes that accusations were already present within the Vatican system. What it does **not** establish is that John Paul II knew the full extent of Maciel's crimes. That distinction remains necessary. But the coexistence of papal confidence and existing accusations is itself historically significant.

The later role of Ratzinger presents the other side of the chronology. As Prefect of the CDF, he authorized the investigation. As Pope Benedict XVI, he approved the eventual sanctions. The person who ultimately sanctioned Maciel was therefore also the Vatican official who had authorized the

investigation while still CDF prefect. The case demonstrates that the same institution could contain both prolonged delay and eventual correction.

That duality matters for the larger argument of this book. We cannot honestly describe the Vatican as having responded identically at every moment. The Maciel record contains early suspension, later rehabilitation, decades of institutional success, eventual investigation, canonical sanctions and later acknowledgment of the systemic nature of the problem. Institutional failure and institutional correction both belong to the same history.

But correction after decades does not erase the consequences of the earlier delay. By the time the Vatican acted decisively, Maciel had already built an enormous organization. His influence had extended across countries. His reputation had been reinforced by decades of success. His relationship with senior Church figures had become established. The institution surrounding him had grown dependent upon the legitimacy of its founder.

That is what makes the Maciel protection network so important to the entire book. It demonstrates that the durability of abuse does not necessarily depend upon a secret command structure. A powerful predator can become protected by the **normal operation of institutional loyalty** when loyalty is combined with charisma, success, money, obedience and fear of reputational damage.

The network can therefore operate without everyone consciously agreeing to protect a predator. Some defend him because they believe him. Some remain silent because they depend upon the institution. Some distrust the accusers. Some fear scandal. Some value the organization's achievements. Some possess incomplete information. Some may actively obstruct investigation. And some eventually become the people who expose or sanction him. The resulting system can still produce the same outcome: **the predator remains powerful while the allegations remain unresolved.**

The Vatican's 2010 description is therefore the decisive piece of evidence for this chapter. It confirms that the problem surrounding Maciel was not simply the existence of allegations. There was a **defensive mechanism** involving trust, familiarity, silence, discrediting of challengers and concern for institutional reputation. That is precisely the mechanism our wider investigation identified independently as the recurring architecture of Catholic institutional abuse.

Maciel consequently represents the clearest example of the difference between an individual predator and a durable abuse system. An individual can commit crimes. A system determines whether those crimes are exposed, believed, investigated, punished or allowed to continue. In Maciel's case, the material shows how the system around him could absorb accusations without immediately destroying his authority.

The essential sequence is therefore not merely:

Maciel → abuse.

It is:

Maciel → victims → Legion → spiritual authority → dependency → complaints → loyalty and silence → discrediting of challengers → institutional reputation → money and success → Vatican access → delayed investigation → eventual sanctions.

And that is the finding that must carry forward into the next cases. **The central question is no longer whether a powerful priest could abuse people. Maciel demonstrates that he could. The more important question is how an institution could continue to elevate, celebrate and protect the authority of such a person while allegations existed—and why decisive accountability could take decades to arrive.**

In Maciel's case, the answer lies in the network surrounding the predator. The Legion was successful; Maciel was charismatic; money flowed; vocations grew; powerful relationships accumulated; criticism could be silenced or discredited; and the organization's reputation became inseparable from its founder. The eventual Vatican intervention proves that the system could correct itself. The decades of delay demonstrate how difficult that correction could become once a predator had placed himself at the center of an institution.

Marcial Maciel's power cannot be understood without understanding money. The Legion of Christ was not simply a religious community organized around prayer and priestly formation; it developed into a large international institution with seminaries, schools, universities, religious houses, charities, educational centers, oratories and chapels. Our material identifies **15 universities, 50 seminaries and institutes, 177 middle schools, 34 schools for disadvantaged children, 125 religious houses, 200 educational centres and approximately 1,200 oratories and chapels** at the height of the organization. Such an institution required enormous resources, and Maciel became exceptionally successful at generating them.

The importance of this financial capacity goes beyond the size of the organization's budget. Money helped make the Legion useful. A religious organization capable of establishing seminaries and producing large numbers of vocations offered something the Catholic hierarchy needed. An organization capable of establishing schools and universities expanded the Church's educational influence. An organization capable of supporting charities and other institutions could present itself as a successful instrument of Catholic action. Fundraising, recruitment and institutional expansion consequently reinforced one another.

The material explicitly identifies this combination as one of the reasons Maciel became so difficult to challenge. His organization possessed **thousands of seminarians, huge fundraising capacity, schools and universities, religious houses, charities, political connections and direct papal access**. These were not independent characteristics. Together they created an institution of considerable strategic and financial importance within the Church.

The resulting structure can be expressed simply:

RECRUITMENT
↓
SEMINARIES AND SCHOOLS
↓
VOCATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPANSION
↓
FUNDRAISING
↓
FINANCIAL RESOURCES
↓
GREATER INSTITUTIONAL USEFULNESS
↓
GREATER INFLUENCE

Maciel's fundraising ability therefore mattered because it increased the value of the organization he controlled. His success was visible. Schools existed. Seminaries were filled. Religious houses multiplied. Charitable institutions operated. Money was being generated. The organization appeared to be growing rather than failing. In such circumstances, allegations against the founder could become difficult to separate from the perceived success of the institution itself.

This is the phenomenon our investigation described as **institutional blindness produced by success**. When an organization is visibly successful, its leaders can acquire credibility from the success itself. The institution's achievements become evidence, in the eyes of supporters, that its leadership must be fundamentally sound. Maciel's ability to build the Legion therefore helped create an environment in which allegations against him competed with an enormous body of evidence that his followers interpreted in the opposite direction: successful recruitment, financial achievement, expansion and influence.

The danger is obvious. If the founder becomes identified with the institution's achievements, criticism of the founder can begin to appear as criticism of the institution. If the institution's reputation depends upon its founder, protecting

the founder can appear to be necessary to protect everything that has been built around him.

This is exactly the mechanism later described by the Vatican itself. The 2010 apostolic visitation of the Legionaries of Christ concluded that Maciel's conduct had been confirmed by **"incontrovertible testimonies"** and that some of his conduct constituted real crimes. But the Vatican's description went further. It stated that Maciel created relationships of trust and familiarity, cultivated silence, and that people who questioned him were discredited or distanced. Concern about damage to the Legion's good reputation helped create a defensive mechanism that made him extraordinarily difficult to challenge.

This gives us the essential connection between money and protection:

CHARISMATIC LEADER
↓
INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS
↓
MONEY AND PRESTIGE
↓
INSTITUTIONAL USEFULNESS
↓
LOYALTY AND CONFIDENCE
↓
ACCUSATIONS THREATEN THE INSTITUTION
↓
DEFENSIVE MECHANISM

Money did not create Maciel's alleged abuse. Nor does financial success by itself prove that anyone concealed his conduct. The significance of money is institutional. It helps explain why a religious organization could become valuable enough that criticism of its founder carried consequences for people who had invested their careers, reputations and resources in the organization.

The material's description of Maciel's fundraising is therefore particularly important. He became a **major fundraiser**, and the Legion became financially successful enough to attract influential Catholic figures. The investigation also records claims that Maciel provided money and gifts to powerful Catholic figures. These claims are part of the source material and must be distinguished from the more firmly established fact that his organization possessed enormous fundraising capacity. The broader conclusion is that financial relationships helped Maciel cultivate influence.

This is where money intersects with prestige. A religious founder who can raise large amounts of money is useful to an institution. A founder who can

recruit seminarians is useful. A founder who can establish successful schools is useful. A founder who can maintain relationships with wealthy donors and influential Catholics becomes even more useful. Institutional usefulness can consequently become a form of power in its own right.

Maciel's organization also possessed an ideological usefulness during the period of John Paul II. The material records that the Legion appealed to Catholics who opposed progressive movements within the Church and that Maciel cultivated relationships with officials in countries where anti-communist politics were important. The Legion presented itself as a strongly orthodox and militant Catholic organization. This ideological alignment added another dimension to Maciel's usefulness: he was not merely raising money and recruiting seminarians; he represented a particular vision of Catholicism that found powerful supporters within the Church.

The relationship with John Paul II illustrates how these different forms of usefulness could converge. According to our material, John Paul II met Maciel during his first trip to Mexico in **1979**, was impressed by the Legion's recruitment and organization, and subsequently received Maciel repeatedly as a favored figure. The material attributes the relationship partly to ideological affinity and partly to Maciel's fundraising capacity.

This relationship must be described carefully. The material establishes the personal relationship and John Paul II's positive view of Maciel. It does not establish that John Paul II knew the full extent of Maciel's crimes. Our investigation explicitly identifies that distinction: **Maciel's abuse is established as a major historical scandal; Maciel's enormous institutional power is established; Vatican knowledge of allegations is documented; John Paul II's personal relationship with Maciel is established; exactly what John Paul II personally knew and when remains disputed.**

The distinction does not make the relationship irrelevant. On the contrary, it makes it historically important. A powerful religious founder with an enormous organization, substantial fundraising ability and strong recruitment capacity was repeatedly received by the Pope and publicly supported. The existence of this relationship while allegations were already present elsewhere in the Catholic system demonstrates how institutional prestige could coexist with allegations for a very long period.

The chronology makes the contrast particularly stark. The material records that accusations concerning Maciel reached Mexican bishops and cardinals during the **1940s and 1950s** and that Vatican authorities suspended him in **1956** under Cardinal Valerio Valeri. Yet Cardinal Clemente Micara later pardoned him; Paul VI formally recognized the Legion in **1965**; and John Paul II validated its constitutional framework in **1983**. The organization therefore

continued to expand after an earlier period in which serious concerns about its founder had already reached ecclesiastical authorities.

That sequence demonstrates the power of institutional rehabilitation. Once Maciel returned to prominence, his later achievements could overshadow the earlier allegations. The successful organization became evidence of his legitimacy. The greater the Legion became, the more institutional weight his reputation carried. And the greater his reputation became, the more difficult it could be for accusations to overcome the presumption that such a successful religious leader must be trustworthy.

This is the point at which financial power becomes inseparable from reputation. Money builds institutions. Institutions produce visible achievements. Achievements produce prestige. Prestige produces access. Access produces relationships with influential people. Those relationships can reinforce confidence in the institution. Confidence encourages further donations and recruitment. The cycle then begins again.

MONEY → INSTITUTION → PRESTIGE → ACCESS → CONFIDENCE → MONEY

There is no need to claim that every participant consciously understood this cycle. Institutional systems can reinforce themselves without everyone involved coordinating with one another. Donors can give because they believe in the mission. Parents can trust schools because of the Church's reputation. Young men can enter seminaries because they believe they are joining a successful religious order. Church officials can praise an organization because it appears to be producing vocations. Powerful people can maintain relationships because the organization is useful. Each individual decision can therefore appear legitimate while collectively increasing the founder's insulation from criticism.

This is why the Vatican's later description of Maciel is so significant. The defensive mechanism did not depend exclusively upon financial transactions. It included **trust, silence, discrediting of challengers and concern about the Legion's reputation**. Money and institutional usefulness formed part of the environment in which those mechanisms became effective.

The investigation therefore distinguishes between **financial power** and **financial corruption**. We have documented material concerning Maciel's fundraising capacity and his organization's enormous institutional resources. We also have allegations concerning money and gifts to powerful Catholic figures. But the existence of wealth does not itself establish bribery, criminal corruption or payment for protection. Those stronger claims require evidence specific to individual transactions.

What we can establish is that Maciel possessed an unusually valuable institutional asset: the Legion itself. Its schools, seminaries, universities, religious houses and charities made it significant to the Catholic hierarchy. Its fundraising made it financially powerful. Its recruitment made it useful to a Church concerned with vocations. Its ideological orientation made it attractive to powerful supporters. Its international presence gave it prestige. All of these factors increased the institutional consequences of attacking its founder.

The material describes this as **institutional usefulness**—one of five variables that repeatedly appear across the major abuse cases. The other four are **charismatic authority, information control, institutional reputation and victim dependency**. Maciel represents perhaps the clearest convergence of all five.

His charismatic authority was personal. His institutional usefulness came from the Legion. His information control operated through internal surveillance and restrictions on criticism. His reputation was tied to the success of the organization. And his victims were often seminarians and members of a religious movement who depended upon the institution in ways that could make challenging its founder extraordinarily difficult.

This produces a more complete model of the Maciel system:

CHARISMA

- **MONEY**
- **VOCATIONS**
- **INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS**
- **POLITICAL CONNECTIONS**
- **PAPAL ACCESS**
- **INFORMATION CONTROL**
- **VICTIM DEPENDENCY**
  = EXTRAORDINARY INSTITUTIONAL POWER

The central issue is therefore not simply that Maciel was rich or successful. It is that **his wealth and success made him institutionally important**.

That distinction explains why the Maciel case is so valuable to our larger investigation. If an obscure priest had committed similar acts without holding an international organization, his ability to influence the response would have been much smaller. Maciel possessed an institution capable of generating money, recruiting clergy, educating children and young people, maintaining relationships with influential Catholics and projecting a highly successful public image.

The organization therefore became part of the protective environment.

When accusations appeared, the institution had something enormous to lose. When the founder was praised, the institution gained legitimacy. When donors contributed, the organization grew. When seminaries produced recruits, the Church gained personnel. When schools expanded, Catholic influence increased. When powerful figures associated themselves with Maciel, his prestige increased further.

The result was a feedback loop:

SUCCESS → PRESTIGE → ACCESS → SUPPORT → MORE SUCCESS

And alongside it:

ACCUSATION → THREAT TO REPUTATION → DEFENSIVENESS → DIScrediting / SILENCE → DELAY

These two loops could operate simultaneously. The first made Maciel increasingly powerful. The second made him increasingly difficult to challenge.

The importance of the Vatican within this system therefore lies in its relationship with a powerful institution rather than in a simplistic claim that the Vatican "bought" or "sold" protection. The material establishes Vatican awareness of allegations at different points, a 1956 suspension, later rehabilitation, formal recognition of the Legion, John Paul II's relationship with Maciel, later CDF accusations beginning in 1998, investigation under Ratzinger and eventual sanctions.

The chronology demonstrates that the Vatican could act, but that action was not immediate or continuous. The most important institutional question is therefore why the early warning signals did not produce lasting accountability. Maciel's financial and organizational usefulness provides part of the explanation. It does not prove that money alone caused the delay. Rather, it shows why the founder of the Legion possessed a level of institutional importance capable of influencing the environment in which allegations were received.

The later Vatican intervention confirms the other side of the story. Ratzinger authorized the investigation; the CDF examined the accusations; Maciel was removed from public ministry and ordered into a life of prayer and penance; and the subsequent apostolic visitation examined the Legion itself. The institution eventually acted against both the founder and the organization he had built.

But the eventual intervention does not erase the decades during which Maciel's organization continued to grow. By the time the Vatican acknowledged the seriousness of the problem, the Legion had accumulated

enormous institutional capital. Maciel's reputation had been built over generations. Money, schools, seminaries, charitable institutions and relationships with powerful people all existed independently of the original allegations, making the task of dismantling the founder's authority much more difficult.

This is why the Maciel case must be understood as a story of **institutional value becoming institutional insulation**.

The organization was valuable because it raised money. It was valuable because it recruited seminarians. It was valuable because it built institutions. It was valuable because it possessed political and social connections. It was valuable because it appeared successful. And because it was valuable, its founder became valuable. Because the founder became valuable, accusations against him threatened something larger than his personal reputation.

The result was the central contradiction at the heart of this case: **the very success that demonstrated Maciel's usefulness also helped make him difficult to challenge.**

Our investigation does not require us to conclude that every person who supported the Legion participated in a cover-up. Nor does it establish that every financial relationship surrounding Maciel was corrupt. The evidence supports a more precise conclusion: Maciel accumulated an extraordinary combination of money, institutional success, charisma and access to powerful Catholic figures, while the Vatican later acknowledged that trust, silence, discrediting of challengers and concern for institutional reputation helped protect him.

That combination is what made Maciel exceptional. He was not protected merely because he was a priest. He was protected by the **institutional power he had accumulated as the founder of a successful religious empire**.

And this is the lesson that carries into the next chapter. Money by itself does not explain abuse. Prestige by itself does not explain concealment. Papal access by itself does not prove protection. But when **money, prestige, institutional usefulness, charismatic authority and access to powerful people converge around a person already surrounded by allegations**, the conditions exist for a powerful form of institutional insulation.

Maciel's case provides the clearest demonstration of that mechanism in our material. The predator did not merely possess authority over individual victims. He possessed an organization. The organization possessed money. The money supported expansion. Expansion generated prestige. Prestige generated access. Access reinforced confidence. And confidence helped preserve the founder's position.

The final result was a system in which **the success of the institution could become part of the protection of the individual who controlled it**. That is why money matters in the Maciel story—not because wealth automatically purchases silence, but because financial and organizational success can make a powerful religious figure increasingly useful, increasingly prestigious and increasingly difficult for the institution itself to confront.

The relationship between Marcial Maciel and Pope John Paul II is one of the most consequential questions arising from the material assembled in our investigation. It must, however, be approached with a precise distinction between what is established, what is documented as an allegation or report, and what remains uncertain. The central institutional fact does not depend upon resolving every question about the Pope's personal knowledge: **serious allegations concerning Maciel existed for years, yet those allegations did not prevent Maciel from continuing to rise, expanding his organization and receiving extraordinary recognition within the Catholic Church.**

The chronology begins long before John Paul II became pope. According to the material, accusations concerning Maciel reached Mexican bishops and cardinals during the **1940s and 1950s**, and information about his drug dependency also reached Rome. In **1956**, Vatican authorities suspended Maciel under Cardinal Valerio Valeri. Yet the suspension did not permanently end his career. The material records that Cardinal Clemente Micara later pardoned him, that Paul VI formally recognized the Legion of Christ in **1965**, and that John Paul II later validated its constitutional framework in **1983**.

This sequence establishes the central paradox of the case. Maciel did not rise from obscurity into prominence without warning signals. The warnings existed before the papacy of John Paul II. Nevertheless, instead of disappearing from Catholic life after the 1956 episode, Maciel returned to prominence and built an increasingly powerful organization. By the time John Paul II encountered him, Maciel was no longer simply an accused priest. He was the founder of a rapidly expanding religious movement with seminaries, schools, universities, religious houses, charities and substantial financial resources.

John Paul II met Maciel during his first trip to Mexico in **1979**. The material states that the Pope was impressed by the Legion's recruitment and organization and subsequently received Maciel repeatedly as a favored figure. The relationship is attributed in the material partly to ideological affinity and partly to Maciel's fundraising capacity and ability to produce vocations. The Legion represented a form of Catholic renewal particularly compatible with the vision of a pope strongly concerned with traditional Catholic identity and resistance to communism.

The Legion's usefulness to the Church was therefore substantial. Maciel's organization recruited young men for the priesthood, established educational institutions and developed a major fundraising operation. Its growth made it increasingly visible and increasingly valuable. The material describes Maciel as a major fundraiser whose organization possessed enormous financial and organizational capacity. This success helped establish the public image of Maciel not as a marginal or problematic priest but as a successful builder of Catholic institutions.

The relationship with John Paul II consequently existed within this larger context of institutional success. The Pope saw an organization that appeared to be producing vocations and expanding Catholic influence. Maciel was able to present himself as the successful founder of that organization. His relationship with the Pope therefore reinforced his public standing, while his public standing reinforced the prestige of the Legion.

The material also records a series of public expressions of papal support at a remarkably late stage of Maciel's career. In **November 2004**, John Paul II publicly praised Maciel and celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of his priestly ordination. In **January 2005**, he again addressed the Legionaries and sent a special greeting to Maciel. These events are documented in the material as evidence that the Pope continued publicly supporting Maciel extremely late in his career.

The timing is crucial. By 2004 and 2005, accusations against Maciel were not merely an obscure historical memory. The material records allegations extending back decades and, separately, a formal Vatican process that would ultimately lead to sanctions. Thus, the public support for Maciel occurred against a background in which accusations already existed within the broader Vatican system.

But here the evidentiary distinction must be maintained. **The material does not establish that John Paul II knew the full extent of Maciel's crimes.** It establishes his personal relationship with Maciel, his repeated positive treatment of him, and the existence of accusations within the Church. Exactly what information reached the Pope personally, when it reached him, what he believed about it and what conclusions he drew remain matters requiring careful reconstruction.

This distinction is essential because the historical question is easily distorted in either direction. It would be too strong to write that John Paul II knowingly protected Maciel from punishment without establishing precisely what the Pope knew. But it would be equally misleading to describe the relationship as though the Pope's support occurred in an environment completely free of allegations. The material establishes that allegations existed and that Maciel nevertheless continued to receive papal favor.

There is additional material concerning attempts to bring the allegations to senior Church figures. The investigation records that **nine seminarians formally accused Maciel** and that *God's Bankers* describes John Paul II as having failed to act upon evidence presented by those seminarians. It also records an attempt by Rafael Moreno to warn John Paul II in **2003**. These reports form part of the material's reconstruction of the Maciel protection controversy. They should therefore be presented as evidence contained in the source material rather than converted into a stronger claim than the documentation supports.

The same caution applies to Cardinal Angelo Sodano and other senior figures. The material identifies Sodano as an important supporter of Maciel and records allegations that evidence concerning Maciel reached senior Vatican figures. It also records claims that Maciel's private secretary brought evidence to Rome in 2003 and that this reached John Paul II, Stanisław Dziwisz and Sodano. Other source material reports that Sodano refused to meet Rafael Moreno when Moreno attempted to warn him. These allegations are part of the institutional history recorded in our material, but they must not be transformed into a blanket assertion that every person named knowingly participated in a conspiracy.

The stronger and simpler fact is the chronology.

Allegations existed.

Maciel remained powerful.

The Legion continued to expand.

John Paul II developed a close relationship with Maciel.

The Pope publicly praised him near the end of his pontificate.

Only later did the Vatican impose decisive sanctions.

That sequence is independently important even before every question of individual responsibility is settled.

The 1983 recognition of the Legion's constitutional framework is especially significant in this regard. John Paul II did not merely meet Maciel socially. His pontificate coincided with the continued institutional legitimization of the organization Maciel had built. The material therefore treats the papal relationship as part of a wider process in which Maciel's organization moved from a controversial religious movement into a recognized and highly influential Catholic institution.

The contradiction becomes even sharper when the earlier 1956 suspension is placed beside the later recognition. A Vatican authority had already acted against Maciel decades before. Yet the action did not produce permanent

exclusion. Maciel returned, his organization expanded, and later Church authorities treated him as a significant religious founder. The problem therefore cannot be explained simply by saying that nobody knew anything.

There were warning signals.

There was institutional action.

There was subsequent rehabilitation.

There was extraordinary institutional success.

There was papal support.

And eventually there was renewed investigation and sanction.

That is the actual historical sequence contained in our material.

The role of John Paul II must therefore be situated inside that sequence rather than treated as an isolated question of personal guilt. The Pope's relationship with Maciel mattered because papal favor carried enormous institutional significance. A founder publicly received and praised by the Pope acquired an additional layer of legitimacy. For members of the Legion and for outsiders observing the organization, papal recognition could reinforce the belief that Maciel had the confidence of the highest authority in the Church.

This is particularly important because Maciel's organization cultivated a culture of loyalty around its founder. The material describes internal surveillance, restrictions on criticism and a vow of silence. Members were expected to bring complaints to superiors rather than speak outside the organization. The institutional effect was to strengthen Maciel's position inside the Legion while the public relationship with the Pope strengthened his position outside it.

The resulting structure can be represented as:

MACIEL
↓
LEGION OF CHRIST
↓
SEMINARIES + SCHOOLS + FUNDRAISING + VOCATIONS
↓
INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS
↓
PAPAL RECOGNITION / ACCESS
↓
GREATER PRESTIGE
↓
GREATER DIFFICULTY CHALLENGING THE FOUNDER

This does not prove that John Paul II deliberately intended to shield Maciel. It demonstrates why the relationship mattered institutionally.

The same distinction applies to the question of ideological affinity. The material portrays Maciel and the Legion as attractive to the John Paul II-era Church because of their militant Catholicism, traditional orientation, recruitment of priests, fundraising ability and opposition to communism. The Legion was presented as a sign of Catholic restoration and renewal. Maciel therefore possessed qualities that made him particularly useful to a pope seeking to strengthen traditional Catholic movements.

The political context amplified this usefulness. The material notes that the Legion flourished in countries such as Chile during the Pinochet period and cultivated relationships among wealthy and powerful Catholics. The Legion's appeal to wealthy Catholics and its ability to raise money made it an important institution within the wider Catholic restoration associated with John Paul II.

Again, usefulness is not innocence, and usefulness is not proof of deliberate protection. But usefulness helps explain institutional behavior. A person regarded as successful, orthodox, financially effective and capable of generating vocations is not institutionally equivalent to an obscure priest. The threshold for challenging such a person may become higher because the consequences extend beyond the individual.

The material's most important conclusion is therefore not that John Paul II personally participated in Maciel's crimes. There is no basis in the material for such a claim. Nor should the book state as established fact that John Paul II knowingly protected Maciel from prosecution throughout his pontificate.

The stronger conclusion is narrower:

John Paul II maintained a close and favorable relationship with Maciel; Maciel's organization continued to receive recognition and prestige during the pontificate; allegations against Maciel had existed for decades; and those allegations did not prevent Maciel from continuing to exercise extraordinary institutional power.

That is enough to make the relationship historically significant.

It also creates a useful distinction between **personal knowledge** and **institutional knowledge**. The material documents allegations reaching Mexican bishops and Rome and later formal accusations reaching the CDF. That establishes institutional knowledge at various levels. It does not automatically establish that every senior figure knew the same information. The Vatican is a hierarchy containing many offices and individuals; information can reach one official without reaching another.

This is why the question "Did the Pope know?" is actually several questions:

What allegations existed?

Who received them?

When did they receive them?

Which information reached Rome?

Which information reached the Pope personally?

What did the Pope understand the allegations to mean?

What action followed?

The material itself identifies this distinction as essential to the investigation. It classifies Maciel's abuse as an established major historical scandal, his institutional power as established, Vatican knowledge of allegations as documented, and John Paul II's personal relationship with Maciel as established. But **exactly what John Paul II personally knew and when is classified as disputed and requiring careful reconstruction**.

The chronology after John Paul II provides an important contrast. In **1998**, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith formally received accusations against Maciel. In **2001**, under the new centralized abuse framework, Ratzinger authorized a canonical investigation. The investigation proceeded during the final years of John Paul II's pontificate. In **2005**, Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI. In **2006**, the Vatican announced that Maciel would live a life of prayer and penance and would have no public ministry, while explicitly deciding not to conduct a canonical trial, citing his age and health.

The transition is striking:

JOHN PAUL II PERIOD
Maciel's relationship with the Pope
↓
public recognition and institutional success
↓
controversy over protection and knowledge

BENEDICT XVI PERIOD
Vatican investigation
↓
canonical sanction
↓
later investigation of the Legion itself

This does not mean that Benedict's period suddenly created the problem. The CDF investigation had begun while Ratzinger was still prefect. It means that the eventual institutional response emerged during a transition from John Paul II's papacy to Benedict's.

The 2010 apostolic visitation then went beyond Maciel personally and examined the Legion as an organization. The Vatican concluded that Maciel's conduct had been confirmed by "incontrovertible testimonies" and that some of his conduct constituted real crimes. It also described the defensive mechanism surrounding him: trust, familiarity, silence, discrediting or distancing of those who questioned him, and concern about damage to the Legion's reputation.

This later finding casts the earlier period in a different light. The issue was not simply that one priest had successfully deceived people. The Vatican itself eventually recognized that a system of loyalty and institutional defense had formed around Maciel. That makes the earlier coexistence of allegations and institutional success much more significant.

The Maciel question under John Paul II can therefore be stated without exaggeration:

How could allegations exist for decades without preventing Maciel's continued institutional rise?

The answer contained in our material is not one single act by one person. It is a combination of factors: Maciel's charisma, the Legion's extraordinary success, its fundraising capacity, its production of vocations, its ideological usefulness, its relationships with powerful Catholics, its internal culture of obedience and silence, and the prestige conferred by papal favor.

The Pope's relationship with Maciel consequently belongs inside this larger structure. Papal support did not create Maciel's power. Maciel had already built a powerful organization. But papal recognition could reinforce that power by validating the founder in the eyes of Catholics who regarded the Pope as the ultimate authority.

And this brings us to the central institutional fact of the entire chapter.

The question is not whether allegations existed. **They did.**

The question is not whether Maciel was institutionally successful. **He was.**

The question is not whether John Paul II had a close relationship with him. **He did.**

The question is not whether the Vatican eventually acted. **It did.**

The unresolved historical problem is the enormous distance between those facts.

For decades, allegations and success existed side by side. The existence of allegations did not prevent Maciel from becoming the head of a major international religious organization. It did not prevent recognition of his Legion. It did not prevent his close relationship with John Paul II. It did not

prevent public papal praise near the end of the Pope's life. Only much later did Vatican investigation and sanctions fundamentally alter Maciel's position.

That is the part of the Maciel story that requires no speculation about hidden motives. It is the documented chronology itself.

The ultimate question for this book is therefore not simply whether John Paul II "protected Maciel." That formulation is too blunt for the evidence we possess. The more defensible and more revealing question is **how the institutional environment of the John Paul II era allowed Maciel's authority, reputation and organization to continue flourishing despite allegations that had existed for decades—and what this tells us about the capacity of the Catholic hierarchy to distinguish institutional usefulness from the protection of vulnerable people.**

Maciel's rise demonstrates that allegations alone did not determine institutional outcomes. **Authority, success, money, ideology, reputation and papal relationships could coexist with allegations for an extraordinarily long time.** The eventual sanctions demonstrate that the system could ultimately act. The decades of delay demonstrate how difficult it could be for that action to occur when the accused person had become deeply embedded within the institution itself.

That is the Maciel question under John Paul II: not a simple accusation against a pope, but a documented collision between **allegations and institutional power**.

One of the most important conclusions of our investigation is that **canonical punishment is not the same thing as criminal prosecution**. The Catholic Church possesses its own legal and disciplinary system, governed by canon law, through which priests and religious personnel can be investigated, restricted, suspended, removed from ministry or dismissed from the clerical state. But these internal measures operate on a fundamentally different plane from an ordinary criminal prosecution conducted by the civil authorities of the country in which an alleged crime occurred. The distinction is essential because a person can face serious consequences inside the Church without ever being criminally prosecuted, tried or imprisoned by a state.

The Maciel case provides the clearest illustration of this separation. The allegations against Marcial Maciel were extremely serious and eventually the Vatican itself concluded that his conduct involved objectively immoral acts and, in some cases, actual crimes. Yet Maciel was **never subjected to an ordinary criminal trial or imprisoned**. His final punishment came through the Catholic canonical system rather than through a conventional criminal court.

The distinction becomes especially clear in the Vatican's own account of what happened after the accusations reached the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Beginning in **1998**, the CDF received accusations against Maciel concerning offenses reserved to its competence. In **2001**, the new centralized framework for serious abuse cases was already in force, and Joseph Ratzinger authorized an investigation. After the investigation, however, the CDF decided **not to conduct a canonical trial**. Instead, Maciel was ordered to a reserved life of prayer and penance and was removed from public ministry. Benedict XVI approved the decision.

The sequence is therefore unusually well documented:

ACCUSATIONS
↓
CDF / ROME
↓
RATZINGER AUTHORIZES INVESTIGATION
↓
INVESTIGATION
↓
ROME MAKES DECISION
↓
NO CANONICAL TRIAL
↓
LIFE OF PRAYER AND PENANCE
↓
NO PUBLIC MINISTRY

This is direct evidence of Vatican case-management. It demonstrates that Rome received the accusations, that an investigation was authorized and that the Vatican eventually imposed restrictions. But it also demonstrates the limits of the internal process: even after an investigation, there was no conventional criminal prosecution and, according to the Vatican's own statement, not even a canonical trial.

That distinction changes the meaning of the word **justice**. If a priest is removed from public ministry, that is a significant ecclesiastical consequence. If he is dismissed from the clerical state, it is a more severe canonical consequence. But neither result is equivalent to a criminal conviction. A criminal court can impose the penalties provided by the state's criminal law, including imprisonment. Canonical authorities operate according to a different jurisdiction and pursue a different kind of institutional judgment.

This is why our investigation identified **jurisdictional separation** as one of the most important recurring mechanisms in the Catholic abuse system:

canonical punishment ≠ criminal prosecution.

The difference becomes even more important when considering victims. In an ordinary criminal proceeding, the state investigates an alleged violation of criminal law. Police, prosecutors, courts and judges operate outside the authority of the Church. A canonical proceeding, by contrast, remains within the Church's institutional structure. The investigation is governed by canon law; the relevant ecclesiastical authorities determine the procedure; and the resulting punishment is an ecclesiastical sanction.

This creates two parallel systems:

CHURCH SYSTEM
Complaint → ecclesiastical investigation → canonical decision → canonical sanction

STATE SYSTEM
Complaint → police investigation → prosecution → criminal trial → criminal conviction or acquittal

The two systems can interact, but they are not interchangeable. A canonical finding cannot simply be described as a criminal conviction, and the absence of a criminal conviction cannot automatically be described as proof that an allegation was false. The reasons for the absence of a criminal prosecution can include questions of jurisdiction, evidence, limitation periods, reporting, prosecutorial decisions and other circumstances. The material repeatedly insists upon maintaining these distinctions rather than collapsing different legal categories into one.

The Maciel case is therefore particularly revealing because the Church ultimately acknowledged conduct that it itself described as involving crimes, while the institutional response remained canonical. The Vatican's 2010 apostolic visitation stated that Maciel's conduct had been confirmed by **"incontrovertible testimonies"** and that some of his conduct constituted real crimes. Yet the earlier canonical process had ended without a canonical trial, through restrictions on his ministry and a life of prayer and penance.

This does not mean that the Vatican's action was meaningless. Removal from public ministry deprived Maciel of the ability to continue exercising priestly functions publicly. The order of prayer and penance represented an ecclesiastical judgment against him. Later, the Vatican investigated the Legion of Christ itself and concluded that Maciel's conduct had affected the life and structure of the organization. The Church therefore eventually recognized both the individual wrongdoing and the institutional consequences surrounding it.

But the distinction remains fundamental: **canonical sanction is not imprisonment**.

Maciel died in **2008**, after the Vatican had imposed its restrictions. The material consequently gives us no criminal trial in which a state court examined the allegations and imposed a criminal sentence. The institutional history therefore ends with a canonical response rather than an ordinary criminal judgment.

The same problem appears elsewhere in the material, although the circumstances differ. Fernando Karadima, for example, was the subject of allegations concerning sexual abuse of minors and abuse within confession. The Chilean court accepted the truth of the allegations but found the offences time-barred; the Vatican ordered Karadima into retirement and a life of penance. This demonstrates how the civil and canonical systems can produce different outcomes from the same underlying events: the Church can impose an ecclesiastical restriction while the state court is unable to impose criminal punishment because of limitation rules.

The Karadima example is important precisely because it prevents us from treating the two systems as identical. A case can be recognized as serious within the Church while remaining legally unpunishable in a civil court because of the applicable limitation period. Conversely, a criminal court can convict someone independently of whatever canonical process the Church conducts.

The modern Rupnik case provides another illustration of the continuing separation. More than twenty women, predominantly former nuns, have accused Marko Rupnik of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse. The Jesuits expelled him in 2023 after finding the allegations highly credible. The Vatican later appointed a five-member judicial panel to conduct a canonical trial after the Pope lifted the limitation barrier, and in **2026** the Vatican stated that the canonical case remained under review.

The Rupnik case makes the distinction particularly clear because the Vatican itself has emphasized that the canonical proceedings and civil or criminal law are different matters. The canonical trial concerns the Church's jurisdiction, while civil or criminal law remains governed by the countries in which alleged offences occurred. Thus even a current Vatican canonical proceeding does not replace the criminal justice systems of those countries.

The distinction is also important when considering what the Vatican actually knows. After the **2001** reforms, serious cases involving clerical sexual abuse were increasingly centralized under the CDF. The CDF could receive cases after a local investigation established a "semblance of truth." The centralized system applied to both diocesan and religious clergy and could reach religious orders such as the Jesuits, Legionaries, Franciscans and Salesians, as well as seminaries and religious houses.

This centralization gave Rome substantial institutional knowledge. Vatican officials reported thousands of abuse cases reaching Rome during the first decade of the centralized system. But institutional knowledge and criminal prosecution remain different concepts. Rome could know about an allegation and process it canonically without that allegation necessarily becoming a criminal case in a national court.

This is one reason the enormous Vatican statistics must be interpreted carefully. The material records **3,420 credible allegations against priests between 2004 and 2013**, followed by **848 dismissals from the clerical state and 2,572 other canonical disciplinary measures**. These numbers demonstrate an enormous canonical workload and substantial disciplinary action. They do not mean that 3,420 criminal convictions occurred.

The same principle applies to the Vatican's reported thousands of cases received during the first decade of centralized abuse governance. A case entering the CDF's system is not equivalent to a criminal conviction. The canonical system has its own evidentiary standards, procedures and sanctions.

This creates an important analytical rule for the entire book:

VATICAN CASE ≠ CRIMINAL CASE

CANONICAL SANCTION ≠ CRIMINAL CONVICTION

ECCLESIASTICAL KNOWLEDGE ≠ POLICE INVESTIGATION

REMOVAL FROM MINISTRY ≠ IMPRISONMENT

These distinctions do not minimize the seriousness of abuse. They make it possible to describe the Church's institutional response accurately.

They also expose one of the system's structural limitations. When the Church handles a matter internally, the institution itself controls the canonical process. This means that the same organization in which the abuse allegedly occurred can also possess authority over the investigation and punishment of the perpetrator. That is what makes **internal containment** such an important concept in our investigation. The Church may receive a complaint, conduct an internal investigation and impose an ecclesiastical sanction without the matter necessarily becoming a public criminal case.

Internal handling and active obstruction must nevertheless remain separate. Our material identifies at least four different phenomena that are frequently described by the single word "cover-up": **non-reporting**, where the Church does not notify police; **internal containment**, where the Church handles the matter internally; **information suppression**, where a receiving institution is not told about an allegation; and **active obstruction**, where someone deliberately interferes with an investigation. These are not interchangeable and require different evidence.

This distinction becomes particularly important when evaluating the historical Church. An internal canonical investigation may represent an attempt to discipline a priest, but it may simultaneously mean that civil authorities are not involved. A transfer may remove a priest from one community while leaving him in ministry elsewhere. A canonical sanction may prevent public priestly functions without producing a criminal record. An internal process may therefore produce some form of institutional response while still leaving questions of ordinary criminal accountability unresolved.

Maciel's case brings all of these tensions together.

The Church knew of allegations.

The CDF eventually investigated.

The Vatican imposed canonical restrictions.

The Vatican later acknowledged that his conduct involved real crimes.

But there was no conventional criminal prosecution.

There was no imprisonment.

And there was no ordinary criminal trial establishing guilt in a state court.

This is precisely why Maciel illustrates the limits of internal Church justice. The Church possessed the authority to discipline its priest. It did not possess the authority to substitute canonical punishment for the criminal jurisdiction of the state.

The distinction also helps explain why the later reforms contained in our material are important. In **2016**, Francis established a canonical mechanism allowing bishops to be removed for grave negligence, including negligence involving sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults. Major superiors of pontifical-right religious institutes were treated similarly. This created the possibility of extending canonical responsibility upward from the individual perpetrator to the superior who failed to act.

The reform therefore created a new chain:

PRIEST ABUSES
↓
BISHOP KNOWS
↓
BISHOP FAILS TO ACT
↓
BISHOP CAN HIMSELF BECOME SUBJECT TO CANONICAL ACTION

This was an important development because it recognized that institutional responsibility could exist above the perpetrator. But it remained a **canonical** mechanism. It did not transform Church law into ordinary criminal law.

The **2019 reforms** went further in another direction. The material records that Francis created mandatory reporting mechanisms and that *Vos estis* specifically addressed cover-up and interference. In December 2019, the pontifical secret was removed from abuse accusations, canonical trials and decisions covered by the relevant provisions and CDF-reserved sexual-abuse offences. Professional confidentiality remained, but the old pontifical-secrecy framework no longer applied to these abuse cases.

This is historically significant because it demonstrates recognition within the Church that secrecy and institutional accountability required reform. But again, reforming canonical procedures does not make a canonical tribunal a criminal court.

The distinction also explains why the current Rupnik proceedings are important. The Vatican's canonical trial demonstrates that the Church has developed mechanisms through which allegations can be formally examined and sanctions potentially imposed. But the existence of that trial does not determine whether any criminal offence occurred under Slovenian or Italian law. Those questions belong to the relevant civil or criminal jurisdictions.

The same principle should govern our treatment of every person in the master case database. The investigation distinguishes four categories:

Established perpetrator — conviction, official finding, admission or overwhelming documented evidence.

Credibly accused / formally investigated — serious allegations or institutional proceedings exist, but guilt is not finally established.

Accused of concealment / institutional failure — allegations concern failure to act, transfer, suppression or related institutional conduct.

Institutional connection only — connection to an organization without an allegation of abuse or concealment.

This classification becomes particularly important when canonical proceedings are discussed. A person undergoing a canonical investigation should not automatically be described as a convicted criminal. A person subjected to canonical sanctions can be described as having been sanctioned by the Church, but the nature and meaning of that sanction must be stated. And a person against whom allegations exist but who has never been tried should not be presented as criminally convicted.

The Maciel case nevertheless demonstrates that canonical justice can reach serious conclusions. The Vatican ultimately described his behavior in

extremely strong terms and imposed restrictions. The later visitation found that his conduct involved actual crimes. Thus the absence of a criminal trial does not mean that the Church considered the allegations insignificant. It means that the Church's own disciplinary jurisdiction produced the final institutional response.

The problem, from the perspective of ordinary criminal justice, is that the two systems pursue different forms of accountability. Canon law can determine whether a priest remains in ministry or within the clerical state. Criminal law can determine whether a person has committed an offence against the state and impose the penalties established by law. One system cannot simply substitute for the other.

This becomes especially important in cases where criminal prosecution is prevented by limitation periods. The Karadima example shows that allegations can be accepted as true while criminal punishment is unavailable because the offences are time-barred. Canonical sanctions can still follow. In such circumstances, the absence of imprisonment cannot be interpreted as proof that nothing happened.

Conversely, canonical punishment cannot automatically establish every element required for a criminal conviction. The Church may operate with different procedures and objectives. The proper conclusion must therefore remain tied to the particular proceeding.

The institutional consequence is profound. For much of the history examined in this book, the Catholic Church possessed an enormous internal disciplinary system capable of investigating its own personnel. That system could impose real consequences, but it could also operate without the transparency, independence and public procedures associated with ordinary criminal courts. The distinction between **internal justice and external justice** therefore becomes one of the central themes of the modern abuse story.

Maciel demonstrates the problem in its purest form. He was eventually condemned within the institutional system. His public priestly ministry ended. He was ordered into a life of prayer and penance. The Vatican later acknowledged the seriousness of his conduct and the damage his personal system had caused to the Legion. Yet the man at the center of one of the most consequential Catholic abuse scandals never stood before an ordinary criminal court and never went to prison.

The significance is not simply that Maciel escaped imprisonment. It is that the Church's institutional machinery could produce a form of accountability **without producing criminal accountability**.

That is the jurisdictional separation our investigation must retain throughout the remainder of the book.

When Rome receives an abuse file, we must ask what kind of proceeding followed. Was it a canonical investigation? Was there a canonical trial? Was the person removed from ministry? Was he dismissed from the clerical state? Was the case reported to civil authorities? Did a criminal investigation occur? Was there a prosecution? Was the case time-barred? Was there a conviction?

Only by answering those questions can we determine what kind of justice actually occurred.

The Maciel chronology provides the clearest answer:

Vatican knowledge → canonical investigation → Vatican decision → canonical restrictions → no canonical trial → no criminal trial.

The Church therefore exercised its own authority over Maciel, but that authority had limits. It could discipline him as a priest. It could not imprison him through canon law. It could restrict his ministry. It could not replace the criminal jurisdiction of Mexico or any other state. It could acknowledge that his conduct included crimes. But the absence of a criminal prosecution meant that those crimes were never adjudicated through an ordinary criminal trial.

This is why the distinction between the two systems is not a technical footnote. It is central to understanding the entire history of Catholic abuse.

Internal Church justice can punish a priest as a member of the Church. Criminal justice determines whether a person has violated the criminal law of a state.

Maciel shows exactly what happens when the first exists without the second. The institution can eventually act, yet the victim may never see the perpetrator subjected to the ordinary criminal process that exists outside the Church.

And that is one of the most important conclusions of the investigation: **canonical justice can be real, serious and consequential while still being fundamentally different from criminal justice.** The existence of an ecclesiastical sanction therefore tells us that the Church acted; it does not tell us that the state prosecuted the crime. In Maciel's case, the distinction is unmistakable—and it reveals one of the central limits of a system in which an institution possesses both the authority to investigate its members and the authority to determine their ecclesiastical punishment.

McCarrick

The Theodore McCarrick case presents a different version of the institutional failure already visible in the Maciel story. Maciel was a powerful religious

founder whose organization, money and personal influence helped insulate him from allegations. McCarrick's position was different: he was a senior member of the Catholic hierarchy who continued to advance through episcopal appointments despite allegations and warnings circulating within the Church. The central question is therefore not simply what McCarrick did as an individual, but **how information about him moved through the hierarchy while his career continued upward**.

The material places the McCarrick case directly within the institutional history of the John Paul II period. The case is described as an "almost perfect case study of institutional failure" because the Vatican's own later investigation reconstructed what happened inside the hierarchy. Unlike cases in which the Vatican's knowledge must be inferred from scattered reports, the **2020 Holy See investigation** examined Vatican archives, the Washington nunciature, U.S. diocesan archives and witness testimony. Its purpose was specifically to reconstruct the Holy See's institutional knowledge and decision-making concerning McCarrick.

That makes the case unusually important. The question is no longer simply whether rumors about a powerful bishop existed somewhere. We can follow an institutional chain:

VICTIMS
↓
McCARRICK
↓
LOCAL / EPISCOPAL AUTHORITIES
↓
NUNCIO / VATICAN
↓
JOHN PAUL II
↓
ARCHBISHOP OF WASHINGTON
↓
CARDINAL

The purpose of reconstructing this chain is to determine **who knew what at each point of McCarrick's advancement**. That is a substantially more precise question than simply declaring that a pope protected him.

The material records that the allegations surrounding McCarrick were not confined to the final years of his career. The eventual Vatican investigation documented **decades of complaints** and failures by bishops, cardinals and other officials to stop him. The case therefore presents the same fundamental institutional contradiction found with Maciel: information concerning

troubling conduct existed within the Church while the person at the center of that information remained institutionally successful.

But the mechanism was different. Maciel's protection was closely connected with the organization he founded and the financial and vocational resources it generated. McCarrick's power was principally **hierarchical**. His career depended upon episcopal appointments and his position within the upper levels of the Church. His advancement therefore provides a direct test of whether information about a senior cleric was adequately considered when important decisions about his future were being made.

The most consequential point in the material concerns the appointment of McCarrick as **Archbishop of Washington in 2000**. According to the Vatican's 2020 investigation, John Paul II had commissioned an inquiry into allegations concerning McCarrick and nevertheless appointed him to Washington after receiving a personal denial from McCarrick. This is one of the strongest documented examples in our material of allegations entering the decision-making process without preventing the accused cleric's advancement.

The significance lies in the sequence itself.

ALLEGATIONS
↓
INQUIRY COMMISSIONED
↓
McCARRICK DENIES THE ALLEGATIONS
↓
DECISION CONCERNING HIS APPOINTMENT
↓
WASHINGTON APPOINTMENT
↓
CONTINUED HIERARCHICAL ADVANCEMENT

Whatever judgment one ultimately makes about the decisions involved, the chronology demonstrates that the allegations did not simply disappear before the appointment. They became part of an institutional decision-making process and yet McCarrick continued upward.

This is the crucial difference between **institutional knowledge** and **institutional consequence**. An institution can know something without acting upon it in the way victims or outside observers might expect. Knowledge can be incomplete. Information can be contradictory. Officials can believe denials. Investigations can produce uncertain conclusions. Different authorities can possess different portions of the available information. The

existence of information therefore does not automatically establish deliberate protection.

But where information reaches the decision-making hierarchy and the individual nevertheless receives further promotion, the decision itself becomes historically significant.

The McCarrick case therefore requires a much more detailed reconstruction of the information pathway. Our material identifies **Carlo Maria Viganò** as an especially important figure because the later Vatican report records memoranda he sent to his superiors in **2006 and 2008** concerning McCarrick. Those memoranda referred to allegations and rumors dating back to the 1980s and raised concerns about scandal. Viganò's superiors included **Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone** and **Archbishop Leonardo Sandri**, and the material states that Bertone and Sandri shared Viganò's concerns.

This creates a documented senior-level information pathway:

VIGANÒ
↓
SANDRI / BERTONE
↓
SECRETARIAT OF STATE
↓
HOLY SEE

The significance is enormous for the institutional history of abuse. It demonstrates that information concerning McCarrick was not merely circulating among private individuals. By the Benedict XVI period, concerns had entered the senior Vatican information system.

The investigation's own framework therefore distinguishes different levels of Vatican knowledge. A rumor circulating outside Rome is one thing. A local bishop knowing about an allegation is stronger. A papal nuncio knowing is a very strong Vatican connection. A formal case reaching the CDF establishes direct Roman case knowledge. A memorandum reaching the Secretariat of State establishes direct senior-Vatican knowledge. And information personally received by the Pope represents the highest level of the hierarchy identified in our model.

McCarrick is valuable precisely because his case allows these categories to be tested against an actual Vatican investigation.

The material therefore insists upon a distinction between:

What was known?

What was suspected?

What was decided?

What was the result?

These four categories prevent the case from collapsing into a simple accusation. They allow us to reconstruct the movement of information and the consequences of decisions. The central institutional question becomes: **when did information reach each authority, what did that authority understand it to mean, and what decision followed?**

The John Paul II appointment is particularly important because it sits at the intersection of those four questions. The material establishes that an inquiry had been commissioned. It establishes that McCarrick personally denied the allegations. It establishes that he was nevertheless appointed Archbishop of Washington in 2000. The later Vatican investigation then documented decades of complaints and institutional failures to stop him.

That is sufficient to identify a serious institutional failure without claiming more than the evidence permits.

It would be too simple to say:

"John Paul II knew McCarrick was guilty and promoted him anyway."

The material does not establish that proposition in that form.

The documented sequence is more precise:

allegations existed → an inquiry was commissioned → McCarrick denied them → he was appointed Archbishop of Washington → later Vatican investigation documented decades of complaints and failures.

That distinction is essential because the question of **personal knowledge** is different from the question of **institutional handling of allegations**.

The case also demonstrates why seniority matters. A complaint concerning an unknown parish priest and a complaint concerning a cardinal or archbishop do not move through the hierarchy in identical ways. The more senior the cleric, the more levels of authority may become involved. An archbishop can have direct relationships with bishops, cardinals, nuncios and Vatican officials. His reputation can become intertwined with the reputation of the hierarchy itself.

McCarrick's later career demonstrates how far this institutional advancement could go. He became **Archbishop of Washington**, one of the most prominent American diocesan positions, and subsequently a cardinal. The very fact that he reached such positions despite the history of allegations is the central phenomenon this chapter examines. The investigation therefore treats his promotions not as background biography but as evidence of how institutional decisions interacted with information about him.

The material identifies this as the central research question:

How could a cleric with allegations surrounding him continue rising through the hierarchy?

That question is more powerful than simply listing accusations because it forces us to examine the institutional chain.

Who received the first complaints?

Who investigated?

Who communicated the results?

Who recommended McCarrick for advancement?

Who had the authority to stop the advancement?

What information reached Rome?

What information reached the Pope?

What did the Pope believe?

And what happened afterward?

The 2020 Vatican investigation is important because it attempted to answer these questions retrospectively using the Church's own records. The Secretariat of State examined the **Holy See archives, the Washington nunciature, U.S. diocesan archives and witness testimony**. This makes McCarrick one of the strongest opportunities available in our material for determining what Rome actually knew rather than relying entirely upon a theoretical model of Vatican secrecy.

The later memoranda of Viganò provide a second important stage. In **2006 and 2008**, according to the material, he raised concerns about McCarrick with Bertone and Sandri. These concerns referred to allegations and rumors dating to the 1980s and raised the possibility of scandal. The material therefore demonstrates that concerns remained active at senior Vatican levels during the Benedict XVI period.

This changes the chronology again.

McCarrick's earlier advancement occurred during John Paul II's pontificate.

By the Benedict XVI period, senior Vatican officials were receiving further memoranda concerning him.

Yet McCarrick remained a major figure until the scandal finally became impossible to contain.

The case therefore crosses pontificates and demonstrates that institutional failure cannot simply be attributed to one moment.

The chronology can be represented as:

EARLIER ALLEGATIONS
↓
EPISCOPAL / LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
↓
JOHN PAUL II–ERA INQUIRY
↓
2000 WASHINGTON APPOINTMENT
↓
CARDINAL / SENIOR STATUS
↓
2006 VIGANÒ MEMORANDUM
↓
2008 VIGANÒ MEMORANDUM
↓
BERTONE / SANDRI
↓
SENIOR VATICAN KNOWLEDGE
↓
EVENTUAL EXPOSURE AND SANCTIONS

The importance of this chronology is that the institutional problem persisted even as information moved upward.

The material also places **Tarcisio Bertone** in an important position within this chain. Bertone was CDF Secretary during the 2001 centralization of abuse cases and later became Secretary of State. He therefore occupied a senior institutional position during the period when Vatican authority over serious abuse cases was becoming increasingly centralized and when information concerning McCarrick was reaching senior Vatican offices.

Carlo Maria Viganò is important for a different reason. His memoranda provide documentary evidence that concerns about McCarrick entered the Vatican's senior information structure. The significance of Viganò in this chapter is therefore not primarily his later political conflict with Pope Francis. It is the earlier information pathway documented in the material: **Viganò → Sandri/Bertone → Secretariat of State → Holy See**.

This is exactly the kind of institutional information flow that our broader investigation seeks to reconstruct.

The material also cautions us against turning every person connected to the McCarrick case into a perpetrator or participant in a cover-up. The master classification distinguishes **established perpetrators**, **credibly accused or formally investigated persons**, **people accused of concealment or**

institutional failure, and **people with institutional connections only**. This distinction is particularly important in a case involving a large number of bishops, cardinals, nuncios and Vatican officials.

The case therefore has to be read through different levels of responsibility.

McCarrick himself belongs to the category concerning the allegations and findings surrounding his own conduct.

Other people may belong to the category of institutional decision-makers.

Others may simply have been part of the information chain.

Others may have received information and failed to act.

Still others may have acted to investigate or sanction him.

Those categories cannot be collapsed into one.

The material's description of the Vatican's institutional responsibility is useful here. It identifies three levels. **Level 1 is direct participation**, where a Vatican official personally abuses, facilitates, transfers, conceals or obstructs an investigation. **Level 2 is institutional knowledge**, where a Vatican office receives a case, file or report and therefore knows about an allegation. **Level 3 is structural responsibility**, where the Vatican creates or maintains the system governing canonical proceedings, bishops, religious orders, secrecy, discipline and appointments.

McCarrick's case is especially valuable for Level 2 and Level 3 analysis. The 2020 investigation allows us to identify institutional knowledge. His appointments allow us to examine how that knowledge interacted with hierarchical decision-making. And the Vatican's authority over bishops and senior clerics places the case within the broader question of structural responsibility.

The case also demonstrates the difference between **knowledge and action**. An institution may possess information without considering it conclusive. An allegation may be disputed. An accused person may deny it. An investigation may produce uncertainty. Senior officials may therefore make decisions believing they are justified by the information available to them at that moment.

But once a later investigation reconstructs the history and demonstrates that multiple complaints and warnings existed over an extended period, the cumulative record becomes much harder to dismiss as a single misunderstanding.

That is what makes McCarrick different from a case based on one isolated rumor. The material describes **decades of complaints**, an inquiry commissioned before his Washington appointment, a personal denial,

continued advancement and later memoranda reaching senior Vatican officials. The pattern is therefore cumulative.

The institutional failure lies precisely in that accumulation.

One warning can be dismissed.

One rumor can be disputed.

One allegation can be denied.

But when allegations recur over decades and different authorities encounter them at different points, the question becomes whether the institution has a mechanism capable of recognizing the pattern.

McCarrick demonstrates how that mechanism could fail.

The problem was not necessarily that every official knew everything. The problem was that information existed at multiple points within the hierarchy while the individual's career continued. The institutional system therefore failed to translate all available information into effective preventive action.

This is why the McCarrick case should be placed beside Maciel rather than treated as a duplicate.

Maciel demonstrates:

predator → religious organization → money → prestige → papal access → loyalty → silence → delayed investigation.

McCarrick demonstrates:

allegations → hierarchy → inquiry → denial → promotion → senior Vatican information → continued institutional status → eventual exposure.

The first case emphasizes the power of a religious founder over an organization. The second emphasizes the power of **hierarchical advancement despite allegations**.

Together they reveal something broader about the Catholic system: institutional protection does not necessarily require one mechanism. It can operate through money and organizational usefulness in one case and through hierarchy, appointments and information failures in another.

The McCarrick case also provides an important test of the proposition that Vatican responsibility must be divided by time. Before **2001**, serious abuse cases were not handled through the same centralized Vatican pipeline that would later exist under the CDF. After 2001, grave clerical sexual-abuse cases involving minors were formally centralized. McCarrick's chronology therefore crosses the boundary between a more locally controlled system and an increasingly centralized one.

This makes his case particularly useful for evaluating whether centralization actually improved accountability. If information continued to move through the hierarchy without producing adequate action, centralization alone would not solve the institutional problem. What mattered was not merely where the information was stored but how decision-makers interpreted and acted upon it.

The later history demonstrates that the system eventually did act against McCarrick. The material records his eventual removal and the Vatican investigation that followed. But the fact that decisive action came only after his decades-long rise is precisely what makes the case so important.

The institutional question is therefore not:

"Was McCarrick eventually punished?"

He was.

The question is:

"Why was decisive action not taken earlier, despite the existence of allegations and warnings at multiple levels?"

That is the failure the case exposes.

The 2020 report's importance lies in its attempt to reconstruct that failure from the inside. The Holy See did not merely issue a general statement. It examined archives and testimony in order to establish the institutional chain of knowledge and decision-making. The report therefore provides exactly the kind of evidence required for the framework developed in this book: **who knew, when they knew, through which channel they knew, what decisions were made, and what consequences followed.**

This also demonstrates why the word **"Vatican"** must be used carefully. The Vatican is not a single individual. It consists of the Pope, Secretariat of State, CDF/DDF, nunciatures and other offices. Information can reach one office without reaching another. One official can support an investigation while another resists it. A decision can be made at one level and later reversed at another. The institutional network is therefore better represented as a flow of information and authority than as a single mind.

Our model is:

POPE
↓
SECRETARIAT OF STATE
↓
NUNCIATURES / CDF / OTHER DICASTERIES
↓

BISHOPS / MAJOR SUPERIORS
↓
DIOCESES / RELIGIOUS ORDERS
↓
PRIESTS / RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL
↓
VICTIMS

Information moves upward.

Discipline moves downward.

Transfers move sideways.

Around all of it sit **money, appointments, friendships, institutional loyalty, reputation, political relationships, religious authority, confidentiality and international mobility**.

McCarrick fits this model exceptionally well because his case is fundamentally about movement through that hierarchy.

The allegations moved upward.

The appointments moved downward.

McCarrick himself moved upward.

Information accumulated.

Yet institutional advancement continued.

The final exposure therefore revealed not merely the conduct of one senior cleric but the failures of multiple institutional layers to stop his advancement.

This is the central lesson of the McCarrick case.

It does not prove that every bishop who encountered him protected him. It does not prove that every Vatican official knew the same facts. It does not prove that John Paul II knowingly promoted an abuser. It does not prove that every person named in later controversies participated in a cover-up.

It establishes something more precise and, for the purposes of this book, more important:

A senior Catholic cleric could remain institutionally successful despite allegations being known within the hierarchy, and the Church's own later investigation documented failures by multiple bishops, cardinals and officials to stop him.

That is the institutional failure.

The McCarrick case therefore gives us a second model of how the Catholic abuse system could fail. Maciel shows what happens when a powerful founder

becomes insulated by **organization, money, charisma and institutional usefulness**. McCarrick shows what happens when a powerful cleric becomes insulated by **hierarchy, reputation, appointments and failures in the transmission and evaluation of information**.

The two cases meet at the same point.

Allegations existed.

Authority remained intact.

Institutional advancement continued.

Accountability came later.

That recurring distance between knowledge and action is what makes McCarrick indispensable to the history of the modern Catholic abuse system. It moves the investigation beyond the question of individual predators and into the machinery that surrounded them.

The critical fact is therefore not simply that Theodore McCarrick was eventually exposed. It is that **the hierarchy had multiple opportunities to respond before his career reached its highest levels**. The 2020 Vatican investigation gives us the opportunity to follow those opportunities one by one.

And that is where the real institutional story begins: not with the final scandal, but with the earlier warnings that did not stop the rise.

Groër, Karadima and the Wider Pattern

The cases of **Hans Hermann Groër in Austria** and **Fernando Karadima in Chile** demonstrate that the pattern identified in the Maciel and McCarrick cases was not confined to Mexico, the United States, or a single religious organization. They arose in different countries and involved different institutional environments, yet both cases contain several of the same elements: religious authority, access to minors, allegations made over time, the intimate setting of confession, questions concerning credibility, and eventual intervention through the Church's canonical system. Together they show that the problem was capable of reproducing itself across national and institutional boundaries.

Hans Hermann Groër, an Austrian cardinal and former Benedictine abbot, was accused of sexually abusing boys, including abuse associated with the **confessional**. The material records testimony from **at least twelve men** who described experiences dating from their childhood at a church school.

According to the account in *The Dark Box*, Groër would invite boys to his room to hear their confessions, after which he allegedly instructed them to remove their clothes and sexually abused them.

The confessional element makes the Groër case particularly important to the history developed in this book. Confession was not simply another physical location. It was an institution built upon an extraordinary asymmetry of knowledge and authority: the priest heard the private disclosures of the believer while occupying the position of spiritual authority. When the person seeking confession was a child, that asymmetry was combined with age, dependence and trust.

In the Groër allegations, the material describes precisely this combination. Boys attending a church school were placed in a relationship with a senior religious figure who possessed spiritual authority over them. The alleged transition from confession to sexual abuse therefore demonstrates how a sacred and private religious practice could, according to the testimony recorded in the material, become the setting for exploitation. The significance is not merely that abuse allegedly occurred in a particular room; it is that the **confessional relationship itself created access and vulnerability**.

The credibility of the accusations was subsequently supported by senior members of the Austrian hierarchy. *The Dark Box* states that **four of Groër's fellow bishops, including his successor, Cardinal Archbishop Christoph Schönborn, confirmed the credibility of the many accusations against him**. This is an important evidentiary point because it moves the case beyond a simple description of allegations. The material records that senior Church figures considered the accusations credible.

The case therefore contains a sequence similar to the wider pattern:

BOYS / MINORS
↓
RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY
↓
CONFESSION
↓
PRIVATE ACCESS
↓
ALLEGATIONS
↓
CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENT BY BISHOPS
↓
INSTITUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES

The material also records a significant social consequence in Austria. Groër's case contributed to a substantial loss of confidence among Austrian Catholics, with thousands reportedly leaving the Church and others joining movements opposed to Vatican centralization and conservatism. The importance of this consequence is that abuse did not remain confined to the relationship between perpetrator and victim. Once allegations concerning a senior Church figure became credible, they could undermine confidence in the wider institution.

The Groër case consequently demonstrates another recurring feature of the Catholic abuse history: **institutional reputation can become both a cause of resistance and a consequence of exposure**. Before allegations become accepted, concern about the reputation of the Church can encourage defensive behavior. Once credible allegations become undeniable, the damage to that reputation can become enormous.

Fernando Karadima provides an even more detailed parallel from **Chile**. The material describes him as a priest whose alleged abuse involved **minors and confession**. He was also an exceptionally influential figure within Chilean Catholicism, well connected in government and business circles and known for having trained numerous priests, including **four bishops**. His position therefore combined spiritual authority with an extensive network of ecclesiastical influence.

According to the material, allegations concerning Karadima had existed since at least **1984**. The case eventually involved approximately **50 complaints** and testimony from **14 witnesses**, with the reported period of abuse extending from the late 1960s onward. The material describes dozens of boys between the ages of **12 and 17** as victims in the allegations.

The allegations therefore covered decades rather than a single incident. This is important because it establishes the same temporal problem encountered with Maciel and McCarrick: information about alleged abuse can exist for a long period without immediately producing effective institutional intervention.

The Chilean case also demonstrates how a religious predator could build a network around young people. The victims' lawyer, Juan Pablo Hermosilla, described Karadima as identifying boys with family problems, winning their loyalty to the parish and gradually separating them from their families before abusing them. This account places **dependency** at the center of the mechanism. The priest's authority did not simply give him access to children; according to the account, it helped him establish relationships of loyalty and dependence before the alleged abuse occurred.

The setting of confession is again important. Karadima's alleged abuse was connected with the private religious relationship between priest and believer. The material therefore places him alongside Groër as another case in which

confession formed part of the environment surrounding allegations of sexual abuse. This reinforces the historical point established earlier in the book: the confessional could provide extraordinary access to the private lives of vulnerable people because the priest occupied a position of spiritual trust and authority.

Karadima's institutional influence extended far beyond individual victims. He operated from the parish of **El Bosque**, which became a center of influence among conservative Catholic circles in Chile. The material describes a group known as the **Priestly Union**, consisting of five bishops and dozens of conservative priests, as being devoted to Karadima. His organization is compared directly with the Legion of Christ's relationship to Maciel.

This comparison is significant. Maciel controlled a vast religious movement. Karadima controlled a smaller but highly influential network of priests and seminarians. In both cases, the central religious figure accumulated followers who depended upon him and who regarded him as an important source of spiritual formation and advancement.

The network around Karadima also connected him with powerful political and ecclesiastical figures. The material describes the close relationship between Karadima and **Angelo Sodano**, who served as apostolic nuncio in Chile and later became Secretary of State to John Paul II. Sodano was frequently present at El Bosque and was closely associated with Karadima. Karadima also reportedly cultivated information about Chilean priests and passed information to Sodano concerning progressive clergy.

This political dimension makes Karadima particularly important to the institutional story. His parish became a meeting place for powerful Chilean figures during the Pinochet dictatorship. Army officers, members of the secret police and government ministers reportedly attended the parish. The material describes El Bosque as effectively becoming a meeting point for conservative and pro-Pinochet circles.

The relationship between Karadima, Sodano and the dictatorship must nevertheless be presented according to the evidentiary distinctions contained in the material. The source makes strong claims about political connections and protection, but it also explicitly distinguishes Sodano's alleged institutional knowledge from personal participation in Karadima's sexual abuse.

That distinction is crucial.

The victims' lawyer, Juan Pablo Hermosilla, stated that an investigation into whether Sodano personally participated in Karadima's sexual abuse found **no evidence or witness statements indicating that Sodano took part in the**

crimes. He specifically stated that he had never heard anyone say Sodano was present when Karadima committed sexual abuse.

At the same time, Hermosilla considered it difficult to believe that Sodano was unaware of what was happening, given the scale and duration of Karadima's alleged crimes and the fact that many victims were seminarians. This creates precisely the distinction our investigation has adopted elsewhere:

knowledge of allegations or abuse ≠ personal participation in abuse.

Sodano therefore belongs in the institutional history of the Karadima case, but not as a perpetrator of Karadima's sexual crimes. The material itself explicitly states that no evidence was found that he personally participated.

The question of what Sodano knew is consequently different from the question of whether he personally abused anyone. The material presents allegations that he and other senior figures protected Karadima, while also noting an official version in which the Vatican was not informed about the affair until **2010** and that Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz had delayed sending the file to Rome. These competing accounts must remain visible rather than being merged into one assertion.

The chronology nevertheless shows that Karadima's influence continued for a remarkably long time. According to the material, the alleged abuse began in the late 1960s and continued for decades. Complaints circulated during the 1980s and 1990s. Yet a formal inquiry was not held until **2004**, after the fall of the dictatorship. It was only in **2011** that four complaints were judged admissible and the Vatican ordered a canonical trial.

This creates another striking sequence:

ALLEGATIONS
↓
YEARS OF CONTINUED INFLUENCE
↓
FORMAL INQUIRY — 2004
↓
ADMISSIBLE COMPLAINTS — 2011
↓
VATICAN CANONICAL TRIAL
↓
GUILTY FINDING
↓
RETIREMENT / LIFE OF PENANCE

The canonical outcome is particularly important. The Vatican ordered Karadima into retirement and a life of penance, and the material states that he was found guilty of sexual abuse of minors. The Chilean court, meanwhile,

accepted the truth of the allegations but found that the offences were outside the statute of limitations. Thus Karadima provides another direct illustration of the distinction established in the preceding chapter: the Church's canonical system and the state's criminal justice system can reach different procedural outcomes in relation to the same underlying allegations.

The later history records that Karadima was eventually reduced to lay status by **Pope Francis in September 2018**. His canonical consequences therefore developed over time rather than arriving in a single moment. The material's chronology shows a movement from allegations, to formal investigation, to Vatican canonical proceedings, to restrictions on his religious status.

The Karadima case therefore demonstrates the importance of **credibility assessment**. The allegations were not simply accepted immediately. Complaints existed for years; formal investigation came later; certain complaints were ultimately judged admissible; and the Vatican then proceeded under canon law. The eventual finding must therefore be distinguished from the earlier stage at which allegations were merely circulating.

This distinction is essential for every case in this book.

An allegation is an allegation.

A credible allegation has passed a higher threshold of institutional assessment.

A canonical finding represents a further stage.

A criminal conviction represents another and legally distinct stage.

The Karadima chronology allows these stages to be seen clearly because the material records both the canonical process and the Chilean court's treatment of the limitation period.

Groër presents a similar pattern of institutional credibility assessment, although the available material is less detailed about the precise procedural chronology. In his case, at least twelve men testified concerning sexual abuse associated with confession, while four bishops—including Christoph Schönborn—confirmed the credibility of the accusations. The case therefore demonstrates that senior Church authorities could themselves reach the conclusion that allegations against a senior cleric were credible.

The two cases also demonstrate how the abuse environment extended beyond one specific type of institution.

Groër — Austria:
church school → boys → confession → alleged sexual abuse → multiple testimonies → bishops confirm credibility.

Karadima — Chile:
parish → vulnerable boys → confession / spiritual authority → alleged sexual abuse → decades of complaints → formal investigation → canonical trial → punishment.

Neither case is simply a repetition of Maciel. Groër's case emphasizes the confessional relationship and the testimony of former boys. Karadima's case adds an extensive network of priests, seminarians, political connections and senior Church figures. But both demonstrate the same underlying vulnerability created when a priest possesses extraordinary access to young people and exercises spiritual authority over them.

The comparison also shows that the problem was geographically broad. Austria and Chile are separated by thousands of kilometers and possess very different Catholic histories. Yet the allegations in both cases involved priests using religious authority in relationships with minors, including the intimate setting of confession. The recurrence of similar mechanisms across different national environments makes it difficult to treat the cases as products of one isolated local culture.

The wider institutional pattern therefore becomes clearer:

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
ACCESS TO VULNERABLE PERSONS
↓
DEPENDENCY / TRUST
↓
PRIVATE OR CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT
↓
ALLEGED ABUSE
↓
COMPLAINTS
↓
CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENT
↓
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE OR DELAY
↓
CANONICAL CONSEQUENCES

This pattern does not mean that every Catholic priest in a position of spiritual authority was an abuser. Nor does the existence of confession mean that confession itself causes abuse. The historical point is narrower: **the structure of the priest–penitent relationship could create unusual access and vulnerability, and in these cases the material records allegations that this relationship was exploited.**

The cases also demonstrate the importance of minors' social circumstances. Karadima's alleged victims were often boys with family problems, according to their lawyer's account. They were drawn into his parish community and became dependent upon the priest's approval and authority. This resembles the broader mechanism already identified in our investigation: vulnerability can be intensified when the religious institution becomes a person's principal source of belonging, guidance and social support.

Karadima's ability to train priests and influence future bishops added another dimension. His power was not confined to his direct relationship with alleged victims. He helped shape the careers and religious formation of other clergy. Consequently, a case involving one priest could have effects extending through the hierarchy.

That is why the comparison with Maciel is useful.

Maciel built the **Legion of Christ**.

Karadima built an influential **Priestly Union and parish network**.

Maciel recruited seminarians and developed an international organization.

Karadima cultivated seminarians, priests and future bishops within Chile.

Maciel's reputation was reinforced by institutional success and papal access.

Karadima's reputation was reinforced by ecclesiastical and political connections.

In both cases, allegations existed while institutional influence continued.

The difference is that the mechanisms of influence were not identical.

The same is true of Groër. His case does not require a vast international fundraising empire. The essential elements were spiritual authority, access to boys, confession, alleged abuse and a later credibility assessment by bishops.

This is exactly why these cases belong together in the book. They demonstrate that the institutional architecture of abuse could take different forms while preserving a common core of **power asymmetry and delayed accountability**.

The canonical consequences also demonstrate that the Church was not incapable of acting. In both cases, eventual ecclesiastical action occurred. Groër faced institutional consequences after the accusations were considered credible. Karadima was subjected to a Vatican canonical process, found guilty of sexual abuse of minors and ordered into retirement and penance. His eventual reduction to lay status under Francis represented a further escalation of canonical consequences.

But the fact that punishment eventually occurred does not eliminate the preceding history. In Karadima's case, the allegations extended back decades before decisive action. The Chilean court's acceptance of the truth of the allegations, combined with its finding that the offences were time-barred, also demonstrates how delay can have consequences for the possibility of criminal prosecution.

This is one of the most important lessons of the two cases.

Time matters.

A complaint that is investigated promptly can potentially lead to evidence collection, criminal prosecution and immediate protection of other potential victims. A complaint delayed for decades may encounter limitation periods, lost evidence, dead witnesses and institutional memories that have become fragmented.

The Karadima case illustrates this directly. The allegations were longstanding, but the Chilean court ultimately found the offences outside the statute of limitations. The Church could still impose canonical punishment, but the ordinary criminal process was constrained by the passage of time.

The same distinction reinforces the argument of the previous chapter: **canonical justice and criminal justice are not interchangeable**.

Karadima could be found guilty under the Church's process.

The Chilean court could accept the truth of the allegations.

Yet the criminal offences could still be legally time-barred.

The three propositions can coexist.

The Groër and Karadima cases therefore deepen the model developed through Maciel and McCarrick. Abuse did not depend upon one country, one order, one pope or one particular organizational structure. It could arise around a powerful founder, within a diocesan hierarchy, inside a parish, through a confessional relationship or within networks of priests and seminarians.

What repeatedly mattered was the relationship between **authority and vulnerability**.

The priest possessed authority.

The young person depended upon the priest or institution.

The relationship could become private.

The alleged abuse could remain hidden.

Complaints could circulate without immediate resolution.

Credibility could become contested.

And institutional consequences could arrive only much later.

The cases of Groër and Karadima therefore establish a wider historical pattern without requiring us to claim that every detail of their institutional histories was identical.

Groër shows how the **confessional could become a setting for alleged abuse of boys** and how multiple bishops could ultimately confirm the credibility of accusations.

Karadima shows how **a highly connected priest could exercise influence over vulnerable boys, seminarians, priests and future bishops**, while allegations remained unresolved for years before eventually producing both canonical punishment and a civil finding that the offences were time-barred.

Together they demonstrate that the modern Catholic abuse crisis was not confined to one continent or one organization.

It was capable of appearing wherever **spiritual authority, dependency, access and institutional power** converged.

And once again, the most revealing part of the history is not merely that abuse allegations existed.

It is that **the allegations could exist for years while the religious authority at the center of them continued to possess influence—until credibility was finally established and the institution was forced to act.**

Seminaries, Schools and Religious Institutions

The cases examined so far could easily create the impression that the Catholic abuse crisis was produced primarily by a handful of exceptionally powerful men. The material assembled in our investigation points to a broader reality: abuse could occur within **seminaries, schools, orphanages, religious houses and other Catholic institutions**, where children, adolescents, seminarians and religious women could find themselves living under unusually strong structures of authority and dependence. These environments matter because they created not merely individual opportunities for abuse but institutional settings in which the person exercising authority could also influence the victim's education, formation, residence, religious life and access to the outside world.

The seminary is one of the clearest examples. Our material describes the traditional Catholic seminary as a highly enclosed environment in which young men lived, studied and underwent religious formation under the authority of superiors. John Cornwell's account of his own seminary

experience describes it as resembling a **"total institution"**: a place where large numbers of similarly situated people lived and worked, were separated from wider society for an extended period, and followed an enclosed and formally administered routine. The description is important to our institutional analysis because it shows how formation, residence and authority could be concentrated in one place.

The scale of some seminaries also mattered. Cornwell describes an English seminary in which approximately **120 students** lived under the direction of a dozen professors or lecturers, alongside several other major seminaries in England and seminaries abroad. The young men were not simply attending occasional religious classes; they were entering a system designed to shape their lives and identities over a prolonged period. Many had entered Catholic formation from childhood and were accustomed to treating religious authority as legitimate and unquestionable.

This makes the seminary an especially important environment for understanding dependency. A young seminarian could depend upon superiors for formation, evaluation, admission to further stages of training and ultimately advancement toward ordination. In the Maciel case, this dependency became particularly pronounced: the material describes former seminarians accusing Maciel of sexual abuse and states that he controlled an organization containing enormous numbers of seminaries and other institutions. His control mechanism included reading correspondence, monitoring telephone calls, scrutinizing friendships, demanding obedience, prohibiting criticism and imposing a vow of silence.

The resulting structure is considerably more powerful than the simple relationship between "priest" and "victim":

YOUNG PERSON
↓
SEMINARY / RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION
↓
SUPERIOR
↓
FORMATION + EVALUATION + SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
DEPENDENCY
↓
POSSIBLE ABUSE
↓
INTERNAL CONTROL OF INFORMATION

The Maciel case demonstrates what happens when this structure is combined with a charismatic founder who controls an entire religious movement. His

organization contained **50 seminaries and institutes**, alongside 15 universities, 177 middle schools, 34 schools for disadvantaged children, 125 religious houses, 200 educational centres and approximately 1,200 oratories and chapels at its height. The importance of these figures is not that every person inside those institutions was endangered or abused; there is no basis for making such a claim. Their importance is that the organization provided Maciel with access to a very large institutional population and gave his authority an enormous physical and organizational reach.

The material also contains examples showing that problematic conduct within seminaries was not confined to the Legion of Christ. Accounts concerning Catholic seminaries in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries describe repeated scandals and disciplinary concerns in different countries and religious orders. These include allegations involving seminarians, faculty members and superiors, demonstrating that seminaries must be examined as institutional environments in their own right rather than merely as extensions of particular personalities.

One of the documented examples in the material concerns **St. Pölten seminary in Austria**, where photographs of the director and deputy director kissing student priests became a major scandal and the seminary was subsequently closed. The material describes this as an extreme case and specifically notes that the director's involvement in such conduct was considered unusual. It should therefore not be generalized into a claim about seminaries as a whole. Its significance is narrower: it demonstrates that the relationship between seminary superiors and students could itself become the subject of serious institutional controversy.

Another case involved **Juliusz Paetz**, Archbishop of Poznań, who was accused of sexual harassment of seminarians. He denied the allegations but ultimately resigned from his post. Again, the importance for this book lies in the institutional setting: seminarians were subordinate to senior clergy whose authority could affect their religious careers.

The material also records allegations concerning seminaries in the United States. The New Orleans archdiocese paid a **$600,000 settlement** to the family of a high-school boy who, according to the source, was sexually assaulted by an adult seminarian during a 1986 visit to Notre Dame Seminary. The Mount Calvary seminary in Wisconsin, operated by Capuchin monks, was described as the subject of lawsuits involving predatory priests who allegedly molested teenage students during the 1970s and 1980s. In Baltimore, six seminarians who later became priests were accused of molesting youths during parish internships undertaken during their formation.

These cases are important because they demonstrate several different institutional pathways.

A person could be vulnerable **inside the seminary itself**.

A person could be vulnerable during a **seminary-related visit**.

A seminarian could encounter potential abuse during a **parish internship**.

A religious order could operate the institution in which the alleged abuse occurred.

The institutional environment therefore did not end at the walls of the seminary. Formation could extend into parishes, religious houses and other Catholic institutions.

This creates the broader network:

SEMINARY
↓
FORMATION
↓
PARISH INTERNSHIP
↓
ORDINATION
↓
DIOCESAN / RELIGIOUS APPOINTMENT

If misconduct is concealed or inadequately addressed during formation, the consequences can potentially extend beyond the original institution. That is why the material treats inter-institutional mobility as one of the three major networks in the investigation. An accused cleric can move from one institution to another, and information about the original allegation may or may not follow him.

The United States evidence identified in our material provides an important empirical basis for this question. Researchers examined duplicate priests appearing in more than one diocese, eparchy or religious community and identified **143 priests with allegations in more than one institution**, representing 3.3 percent of priests with allegations in that dataset. This does not establish that every transfer was designed to facilitate abuse. It does establish that some accused priests appeared across institutional boundaries, making transfers and information-sharing important parts of the system's history.

Schools form a second major institutional environment.

The material specifically directs the investigation beyond churches and seminaries to **Catholic schools and orphanages**. This is important because the authority structure differs slightly from a parish. A child attending a Catholic school can be dependent upon teachers, priests, administrators and school management for education, discipline and daily supervision. In a

boarding environment, that dependency can become even stronger because the institution also controls the child's residence and daily routine.

The recent **Notre-Dame de Bétharram** case in France is used in the material as a particularly useful example because it concerns a Catholic boarding-school environment rather than simply parish clergy. A French parliamentary investigation followed more than **250 complaints**, including approximately **90 sexual-abuse complaints**, and found allegations of systemic violence involving staff and clergy dating back to the 1950s. The material also records criticism of inadequate state oversight of private Catholic schools.

The institutional chain here is different from the seminary model:

CHILD
↓
SCHOOL / BOARDING INSTITUTION
↓
TEACHER / PRIEST / STAFF
↓
RELIGIOUS OR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
↓
DIOCESE / ORDER
↓
STATE OVERSIGHT

This chain is important because it raises a fundamental question for our investigation: **are the mechanisms we have identified specifically Vatican mechanisms, or are they broader mechanisms of Catholic institutional organization?**

A Catholic boarding school may be operated within a national legal system while still possessing strong religious authority and internal structures. A religious order may control personnel and discipline. A diocese may have institutional connections to the school. State oversight may exist but may be weak or delayed. The resulting system is therefore not identical to the Roman Curia, even though it can form part of the wider Catholic institutional environment.

This distinction is essential to the conclusions of the book. We cannot simply call every abuse occurring in a Catholic institution a "Vatican crime." The material supports a broader formulation: Catholic institutions could create environments in which **authority, dependency, secrecy and restricted outside access** became particularly important. The extent to which Rome knew about or controlled a particular case must then be established separately.

Orphanages add another dimension. The material explicitly calls for examination of abuse in **Catholic orphanages**, alongside Native American boarding schools and other institutions serving dependent populations. In these environments, children could be particularly dependent upon institutional adults because the institution was responsible for housing, education, discipline and basic care.

The significance of orphanages is therefore structural rather than merely geographical. The child is not simply visiting a church. The institution may become the child's entire living environment.

HOME
↓
INSTITUTION
↓
RELIGIOUS / EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY
↓
FOOD + SHELTER + EDUCATION + DISCIPLINE
↓
DEPENDENCY

The greater the institution's control over everyday life, the greater the potential consequences of challenging someone who exercises authority within it.

This does not mean that institutional residence automatically produces abuse. The material does not support such a conclusion. Most people who worked or lived in Catholic schools, seminaries, orphanages and religious communities were not accused of abuse. The institutional argument concerns **opportunity and vulnerability**, not automatic causation.

The same distinction is particularly important when discussing religious women.

The material has identified abuse of nuns as a separate network because the relationship is structurally different from the familiar model of priest abusing a child. Here the possible victim can be an adult woman who is nevertheless institutionally subordinate to a priest, superior or spiritual director. The model becomes:

RELIGIOUS WOMAN
↓
PRIEST / SUPERIOR
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
CONFESSION / COUNSELLING

↓
DEPENDENCY
↓
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
↓
RELIGIOUS ORDER
↓
INTERNAL DISCIPLINE / SILENCE

This is why the investigation cannot define Catholic sexual abuse exclusively as **adult priest → child victim**. The material identifies several different relationships:

male clergy → children

male clergy → seminarians

male clergy → adult religious women

superior → subordinate nun

religious women → children or dependent people

teacher / staff → student

institution → orphan or dependent child

The network therefore has several directions rather than one.

The problem becomes especially clear in the comparison between the historical Sant'Ambrogio case and the modern Rupnik case. Sant'Ambrogio involved a closed female religious community in which spiritual authority, confession, obedience, enclosure and sexual manipulation became intertwined. Rupnik provides a modern example involving adult women and former religious sisters, with allegations of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse. The material treats these cases as part of the same broader category of **spiritual authority and dependency**, rather than limiting the investigation to child sexual abuse.

The modern institutional framework has consequently expanded its understanding of vulnerability. The material records that by 2026 the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Ending Clergy Abuse was discussing not only children but also **women religious, seminarians, priests and lay movements**, alongside institutional responsibility, justice and victims' rights. This demonstrates that the institutional scope of the problem is now understood to extend beyond the traditional child-abuse model.

The importance of this development is that it brings the different environments examined in this chapter into one structure.

The **seminary** concentrates formation and hierarchy.

The **school** concentrates education and authority over children.

The **boarding school** adds residential dependence.

The **orphanage** can combine residence, care and institutional control.

The **convent** combines religious vows, enclosure and spiritual hierarchy.

The **religious order** can combine all of these functions across multiple countries.

And the **diocese or Vatican** can sit above them in the institutional hierarchy.

This produces the larger institutional architecture:

VATICAN / DIOCESE / ORDER
↓
RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS / SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
↓
PRIESTS / NUNS / TEACHERS / STAFF
↓
SEMINARIANS / STUDENTS / CHILDREN / RELIGIOUS WOMEN
↓
VICTIMS OR POTENTIAL VICTIMS

Information should theoretically travel upward.

Protection should travel downward.

But our investigation has repeatedly encountered the possibility that information did not always move effectively.

That is where secrecy becomes important.

The material identifies **institutional concealment** as one of the three major networks. Its basic pattern is:

ABUSE
↓
COMPLAINT
↓
SUPERIOR
↓
TRANSFER
↓
NEW INSTITUTION
↓
NEW VICTIMS

The evidence for such institutional mobility is described as substantial in the United States. The existence of 143 priests with allegations in multiple dioceses or religious communities provides an empirical basis for investigating how information and accused personnel moved between institutions.

This is where the school, seminary and orphanage environments become more than separate case categories. They can become **nodes in a network**.

A priest might begin in a seminary.

He might move into parish ministry.

He might work in a school.

He might join a religious order.

He might be assigned abroad.

He might return to another diocese.

If allegations arise and the information does not follow him, the institutional boundary becomes a protective barrier.

The resulting structure is:

INSTITUTION A
↓
ALLEGATION
↓
INCOMPLETE INFORMATION
↓
TRANSFER
↓
INSTITUTION B
↓
NEW ACCESS

The material explicitly identifies this as the central question behind the investigation of inter-institutional mobility. If Rome knew about the original case and the transfer subsequently occurred, Roman knowledge becomes relevant. If Rome did not know, responsibility lies elsewhere in the chain.

This distinction prevents the book from making an unsupported leap from "Catholic institution" to "Vatican responsibility." It allows us to ask the much more precise question: **which institution had authority over the person, which institution possessed information about the allegation, and which institution controlled the next assignment?**

That question can be applied to seminaries, schools, orphanages, religious orders and dioceses alike.

It also explains why the year **2001** is so important. The centralized Vatican framework applied not only to diocesan clergy but also to **religious clergy** and people functioning within ecclesiastical structures. The material states that the CDF's jurisdiction could therefore reach into Jesuits, Legionaries, Franciscans, Salesians, religious houses and seminaries.

Before that centralization, local bishops and religious superiors possessed enormous practical discretion. After 2001, qualifying cases involving grave clerical sexual abuse of minors entered a formal Vatican information-and-discipline pipeline. The change does not mean that Rome suddenly controlled every school, orphanage or religious house. It means that a defined category of abuse cases became subject to centralized canonical governance.

This creates another important distinction:

LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT
and
VATICAN CASE GOVERNANCE

They overlap, but they are not identical.

The abuse may occur in a school.

The complaint may go to a superior.

The superior may report to a bishop.

The diocese may conduct an investigation.

The case may then go to Rome.

Or the process may stop earlier.

The victim may report to civil authorities.

Or may not.

The receiving institution may be warned.

Or may not.

The historical problem is therefore one of **information flow across institutional boundaries**.

The Catholic institutional world was extensive. The material describes an international network of dioceses, religious orders, schools, seminaries, religious houses and charitable institutions. Maciel's Legion alone illustrates the scale: seminaries, schools, universities, religious houses, educational centres and charitable institutions spread across countries.

Such scale has two opposite consequences.

It creates enormous capacity for education, religious formation and social organization.

But it also creates enormous numbers of institutional relationships in which authority and dependency can exist.

That is why our investigation moves beyond famous perpetrators. The question is not simply **who abused?** It is also:

Where did the alleged abuse occur?

Who controlled the institution?

Who supervised the accused?

Who was responsible for the victim?

Who received the complaint?

Was the person transferred?

Was the receiving institution warned?

Did the information reach the diocese?

Did it reach Rome?

Did civil authorities become involved?

Those questions allow us to distinguish an isolated act from an institutional mechanism.

The distinction between family abuse and institutional abuse is also important. The material explicitly separates a priest who abuses children within his own family from a priest who uses his clerical authority to obtain access to unrelated children. The first involves family sexual abuse alongside clerical status. The second is much more relevant to the institutional network because the institution itself may help create the access.

That distinction becomes crucial in schools, orphanages and seminaries.

The institution is not merely the place where abuse happens.

In some cases, it can be the **source of access**.

The child is there because the institution placed the child under the authority of adults.

The seminarian is there because the institution controls his formation.

The nun is there because she has entered a religious community governed by vows and superiors.

The orphan is there because the institution has assumed responsibility for her or his care.

The student is there because the school has assumed responsibility for education.

These relationships create legitimate authority. The problem arises when legitimate authority is transformed into an instrument of exploitation.

This is why the core formula developed throughout our investigation remains:

AUTHORITY + ACCESS + DEPENDENCY + SECRECY = INCREASED OPPORTUNITY FOR ABUSE

It is not a mathematical law and does not mean abuse must occur wherever these conditions exist. It is an analytical framework for understanding why certain environments deserve particular scrutiny.

The same formula helps explain why religious communities are especially important. The material identifies a recurring combination across historical and modern institutions:

closed religious community → hierarchy → restricted outside access → internal authority → dependency → possible sexual exploitation.

The historical continuity should again be stated carefully. The material does **not** establish that one continuous abuse organization existed from ancient Rome through medieval Christianity and into the modern Vatican. It explicitly warns against making that leap. What it does establish is the recurrence of similar institutional conditions: secrecy, hierarchy, closed communities, elite authority and weak external accountability.

The significance of seminaries, schools, orphanages and religious communities is therefore not that every one of them was abusive. It is that they provide the physical and organizational environments in which the larger institutional mechanisms become visible.

Maciel shows the enormous reach a religious organization can provide.

The seminary cases show the vulnerability of people undergoing clerical formation.

Bétharram shows how a Catholic boarding-school environment can generate a different chain of responsibility.

The orphanage and boarding-school material shows how dependent children can become vulnerable within institutions responsible for their care.

Sant'Ambrogio and Rupnik show that the same structural problem can affect adult religious women.

And the transfer evidence shows that institutions cannot always be studied separately because accused personnel and information can move between them.

The resulting picture is therefore much larger than a collection of notorious individuals.

It is an **institutional ecology**.

Within that ecology, authority can be spiritual, educational, residential or administrative.

Dependency can be religious, financial, educational or physical.

Access can come through confession, formation, schooling, residence or pastoral responsibility.

Secrecy can arise from religious confidentiality, institutional loyalty or the simple fact that outsiders cannot easily see what happens inside.

And accountability can be divided between religious superiors, bishops, religious orders, civil authorities and eventually Vatican offices.

That is why these institutions belong at the center of the book rather than in a footnote.

The central finding of this chapter is not that Catholic schools, seminaries or religious houses were inherently abusive. It is more precise: **they created concentrated environments of authority and dependency in which the ordinary safeguards available in open society could be weaker, and where the institutional response to allegations could determine whether a perpetrator was stopped, transferred, or allowed to continue having access to vulnerable people.**

The material's three-network model makes the point especially clearly:

NETWORK A — INSTITUTIONAL CONCEALMENT
abuse → complaint → superior → transfer → new institution → possible new victims

NETWORK B — SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
predator → spiritual/institutional access → victim → repeated abuse → possible multiple victims

NETWORK C — INTER-INSTITUTIONAL MOBILITY
diocese A → accused cleric → transfer → diocese B → religious order → foreign country → new access

Seminaries, schools, orphanages and religious communities can appear in all three.

That is their importance.

They are not merely buildings in the history.

They are **institutional nodes** through which authority, people, information and responsibility move.

And once the investigation is viewed this way, the question changes. We no longer ask only how many famous priests were predators. We ask **how many institutions provided access, how many complaints entered those institutions, what happened to the information, whether accused personnel crossed institutional boundaries, and whether the structures designed to protect the vulnerable sometimes became the structures through which vulnerability was maintained.**

That is the broader Catholic abuse system our investigation has uncovered.

Abuse of Adults

The history established in the preceding pages cannot be reduced to the familiar image of a priest abusing a child. Our material demonstrates a broader category of sexual and spiritual exploitation in which **adult women, particularly women religious, could also become victims when religious authority created intense dependency and limited their ability to resist, leave, or report what was happening**. The central variable is therefore not simply the victim's age, but the relationship between authority, dependency, obedience and access.

This distinction changes the way the entire Catholic abuse system must be understood. A woman religious may be an adult in the ordinary legal sense while occupying a highly subordinate position within a religious institution. She may depend upon a priest, spiritual director, superior, bishop or religious order for spiritual guidance, communal life, formation, employment, status, housing or the continuation of her vocation. In such circumstances, the existence of adulthood does not by itself eliminate the possibility of coercion or exploitation.

Our material identifies this explicitly as **abuse of authority** and **spiritual abuse**. The modern Catholic framework increasingly recognizes not only sexual abuse of minors but also vulnerable adults, abuse of authority, sexual exploitation and interference with investigations. The 2023 revision of *Vos estis lux mundi* specifically expanded the framework to include sexual acts involving abuse of authority and vulnerable adults, as well as members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life.

That development is important because it gives institutional recognition to a problem that had existed long before the terminology became formalized. The

historical material contains cases in which women religious were subject to relationships with male clergy involving spiritual authority, confession and sexual misconduct. The modern cases show the same basic relationship in a new form: **priest or spiritual authority → dependent adult woman → manipulation or coercion → sexual exploitation**.

The historical evidence concerning convents must, however, be handled precisely. The material does not establish that every convent was an environment of sexual abuse, nor does it justify describing medieval nuns generally as sexually promiscuous. The Knudsen study examined a large body of records from 1430–1530 and identified **111 recorded sexual-misconduct acts involving 63 male and 19 female religious**, while concluding that individual misconduct occurred at relatively low and predictable rates and that historians had exaggerated the idea of a generalized sexual collapse of monasteries.

That finding actually strengthens the institutional analysis. Documented misconduct demonstrates that sexual relationships and violations of religious rules occurred; it does not prove that every religious house was abusive. The task is therefore to examine the specific circumstances in which sexual misconduct became **coercion, exploitation or abuse of authority**, and to identify the structures that allowed it to occur or remain hidden.

One of the most significant mechanisms is the relationship between the woman and her **confessor or spiritual adviser**. Medieval and early-modern evidence shows women increasingly relying upon priests as confessors and spiritual advisers, sometimes discussing deeply intimate matters concerning sexuality. Church authorities eventually introduced rules intended to prevent confessors from crossing sexual boundaries with female penitents, while research into the Spanish Inquisition and the Papal States documents cases of sexual misconduct by confessors toward female penitents.

The structure is remarkably clear:

WOMAN
↓
CONFESSION / SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING
↓
INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE
↓
PRIEST
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
POTENTIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The significance of this relationship is different from ordinary sexual contact between two adults. The priest has been entrusted with a specialized religious role and may possess intimate knowledge of the woman's fears, sexuality, guilt, doubts and vulnerabilities. Where that authority is deliberately used to obtain sexual access, the religious relationship itself becomes part of the mechanism of exploitation.

The modern testimony gathered in the material makes this connection particularly important. An academic study of contemplative nuns recorded accounts of sexual trauma involving priests, including violence, exploitation, coercion and psychological and physical distress. Some women described abuse during **postulancy or novitiate**, abuse lasting for years, and perpetrators who were priests whom they trusted; one account described an alleged priest–Mother Superior collaboration in coercing women into sexual encounters.

Here the institutional structure becomes visible again.

A woman enters religious life.

She enters a community governed by vows and obedience.

She is placed under religious superiors.

She may receive spiritual direction from a priest.

The priest occupies a position of trust.

The woman's religious identity may be inseparable from obedience to that authority.

And the very structures that are supposed to guide her spiritual life can potentially be used to manipulate her.

The resulting pattern is not identical to child sexual abuse, but it belongs to the same broader architecture of **power and dependency**.

This is why **Marko Rupnik** becomes central to this part of the book. The material describes more than twenty women, predominantly former nuns, accusing Rupnik of sexual, spiritual and psychological abuse. The alleged mechanism involved spiritual authority, psychological dependency, religious obedience, sexualization of spiritual relationships and manipulation, followed by institutional handling of the allegations. The Jesuits expelled Rupnik in 2023 after finding the allegations highly credible.

Rupnik therefore provides a modern model that can be stated very simply:

PRIEST
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

↓
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCY
↓
RELIGIOUS / SPIRITUAL MANIPULATION
↓
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
↓
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The material emphasizes that this is fundamentally different from the simplest model of sexual predation. The allegation is not merely that a priest sexually assaulted a woman. The alleged mechanism involved **spiritual authority being used to create or reinforce psychological dependency and then facilitate sexual exploitation**.

That distinction matters because spiritual abuse can be difficult to recognize from outside the religious environment. An act may be presented to the victim through the language of vocation, obedience, mystical experience, spiritual intimacy or religious necessity. The victim may therefore experience not only sexual violation but also confusion about whether resisting the authority constitutes resistance to God, the Church or her own vocation.

The material specifically identifies the Vatican's consideration of whether **"spiritual abuse" should become a distinct canonical crime**. The proposal arose partly from cases such as Rupnik, where alleged sexual exploitation was intertwined with claims of spiritual manipulation and misuse of religious authority.

This development is significant for the history presented here because it shows the institutional vocabulary changing. The older framework concentrated heavily on sexual abuse of minors. The newer framework recognizes that a religious authority can also exploit **conscience, obedience, spiritual dependence and adult vulnerability**.

The category therefore expands:

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
is one form of institutional abuse.

But alongside it are:

SEXUAL ABUSE OF VULNERABLE ADULTS

ABUSE OF AUTHORITY

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

ABUSE WITHIN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

MANIPULATION OF RELIGIOUS VOWS AND DEPENDENCY

The material also identifies abuse within female religious hierarchies themselves. This is important because the perpetrator is not necessarily always a male priest. The broader model includes **superior → subordinate nun**, as well as religious founders, spiritual directors and other persons exercising authority.

The four branches identified in our material are therefore:

A. Priest → nun
Sexual exploitation of women religious.

B. Superior → nun
Abuse occurring within religious orders.

C. Spiritual director → adult
Sexual exploitation through confession or spiritual counselling.

D. Religious founder → followers
Charismatic authority combined with sexual exploitation.

This broader model prevents the investigation from making another mistake: assuming that the only relevant perpetrators are diocesan priests. The Vatican's framework encompasses members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. The institutional population therefore includes **priests, bishops, cardinals, monks, brothers, nuns, sisters, religious superiors, seminary personnel and lay personnel operating within Catholic institutions**.

The same principle applies to the victims. The network can include children, seminarians, adult religious women, adult religious men and other vulnerable persons. What connects these cases is not necessarily age or gender. It is the **relationship of dependency to a religious institution or religious authority**.

This is why the phrase **"abuse is not only about children"** is more than a change in terminology. It changes the analytical unit of the investigation.

Instead of asking only:

Was the victim a minor?

we must also ask:

Who possessed religious authority?

Who depended upon that authority?

Could the victim leave freely?

Could the victim refuse?

Could the victim report the conduct without jeopardizing her vocation or position?

Who controlled the community?

Who controlled the information?

Who investigated the allegation?

What happened to the accused?

These questions reveal why an adult woman religious may be extraordinarily vulnerable even when she is legally an adult.

The material concerning medieval convents provides an earlier version of this problem. Clerics, including vicars, chaplains and chantry priests, appear repeatedly in records concerning sexual relationships with nuns, and some chaplains actually lived on convent premises. They could simultaneously exercise **sexual influence and sacramental authority**, including the ability to hear confessions. The resulting structure is precisely the combination of authority, dependency, sexual access and control over religious consequences that later becomes visible in modern cases.

The historical continuity must nevertheless be stated carefully. The material does not prove that the same organization deliberately maintained one uninterrupted sexual-abuse system from the medieval period into the modern Vatican. What it demonstrates is the recurrence of institutional conditions in which **religious authority, enclosure, dependency and limited outside access** could create opportunities for sexual exploitation.

That distinction is essential to the credibility of this book.

The argument does not require us to claim that every historical sexual relationship between a nun and a priest was rape. The material explicitly warns against that equation. **Pregnancy is not proof of rape. An affair is not automatically proof of sexual coercion. Sexual misconduct is not automatically sexual abuse.** Each case requires its own evidence.

But the reverse is equally important.

An adult relationship occurring inside an extreme hierarchy cannot automatically be assumed to have been completely free simply because both participants were adults. Where one person possesses religious, economic, social or institutional authority over the other, the possibility of coercion and exploitation must be examined rather than dismissed.

This is particularly important in religious communities because vows can intensify dependency. A woman who has entered a convent or religious order may have reorganized her entire life around the institution. Leaving may mean abandoning her community, vocation, relationships, housing and identity. The

material therefore identifies **religious vows, social stigma, economic dependency, family pressure, enclosure, fear of scandal, fear of expulsion and institutional control of records** among the mechanisms that can contribute to under-reporting.

The implication is significant: the number of documented cases cannot automatically be treated as the total number of cases that occurred.

Our material describes documented cases as a **minimum observable record**. It is entirely plausible that some abuse remained unreported because victims were dependent upon the institution or feared the consequences of disclosure. But the material also makes an important methodological limitation explicit: there is no defensible numerical multiplier by which the documented cases can simply be multiplied to calculate the hidden population.

This is especially important for adult religious women.

A child may fear an adult.

A nun may fear a superior.

A seminarian may fear the person who determines whether he advances toward ordination.

A member of a religious order may fear expulsion.

A woman may fear that reporting a priest will destroy her vocation.

A community may fear scandal.

These are different forms of dependency, but they can all discourage disclosure.

The institutional problem consequently becomes larger than the individual sexual act.

It becomes:

AUTHORITY

↓

DEPENDENCY

↓

ACCESS

↓

MANIPULATION

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

↓

SILENCE OR DELAY

↓

INSTITUTIONAL HANDLING

This is the same architecture we encountered in the child-abuse cases, but the victim's age has changed.

The **Rupnik** case demonstrates why this distinction matters in the modern period. The material describes former nuns alleging sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse and criticizes aspects of the Church's handling of their allegations. It also notes that victims do not participate in canonical trials in the same way that victims participate in ordinary criminal proceedings and may not receive access to case files.

Thus the victim can experience a second layer of institutional power after the alleged abuse itself.

First:

religious authority → alleged exploitation

Then:

institution → control of the investigation

This is why the institutional response belongs in the story even when the victim is an adult.

The same principle applies to the historic **Sant'Ambrogio** convent scandal. The material places Sant'Ambrogio in the same conceptual category as Rupnik because both involve the intersection of **sexual relationships, spiritual authority, confession, supernatural or mystical claims, institutional hierarchy and religious obedience inside a closed female community**.

Sant'Ambrogio therefore becomes a historical bridge rather than an isolated curiosity:

SANT'AMBROGIO
↓
ABUSE OF NUNS / SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
RUPNIK
↓
MODERN CONCEPT OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE

The continuity is not that the same people or organization were involved. The continuity is structural: a religious authority can possess extraordinary influence over people who have entrusted themselves to a religious

community, and sexual exploitation can become intertwined with that authority.

The material extends the model still further through **L'Arche**, where an investigation found that founder Jean Vanier and priest Thomas Philippe had sexually and spiritually exploited women, with the reported number of women affected reaching up to twenty-five. This demonstrates that the phenomenon is not limited to diocesan priests or convents. A charismatic religious founder can also become the center of a system in which followers become dependent upon his authority.

The resulting system is therefore broader than:

PRIEST → CHILD

It includes:

PRIEST → ADULT WOMAN

PRIEST → NUN

SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR → DEPENDENT ADULT

SUPERIOR → SUBORDINATE RELIGIOUS

FOUNDER → FOLLOWER

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION → DEPENDENT PERSON

The common element is **power exercised through a religious relationship**.

That is the central finding of this chapter.

The age of the victim matters enormously for the legal and evidentiary analysis, but it does not exhaust the question of abuse. A child is vulnerable because of age. An adult nun may be vulnerable because of religious vows, institutional dependence, spiritual authority and the consequences of challenging a superior. The mechanisms differ, but both can produce relationships in which consent, resistance and disclosure must be examined against a powerful asymmetry.

The modern Vatican system itself increasingly recognizes this. The 2019 reforms addressed abuse and interference with investigations, while the 2023 framework expanded the categories to include abuse of authority and vulnerable adults. The material describes this as a significant change in the institutional model: the Church was no longer defining the problem simply as **"bad priests molesting children"**, but increasingly as a problem involving **abuse of power, abuse of conscience, spiritual abuse and institutional cover-up**.

That development brings the historical and modern material together.

The medieval confessor could possess intimate knowledge and spiritual authority.

The religious superior could control a woman's institutional life.

The seminary superior could influence a seminarian's future.

The modern priest could manipulate a nun's spiritual dependency.

The charismatic founder could dominate followers.

And above these individual relationships stood the larger religious institutions responsible for discipline, information and reputation.

The system is therefore not defined solely by the physical act.

It is defined by the **relationship in which the act occurs**.

This is why adult sexual and spiritual abuse deserves its own part of the book.

It reveals something that the child-abuse narrative alone cannot fully show: the deeper problem is not merely that some clergy sexually desired minors. The material points to a broader abuse of **religious power**, in which sexuality can become one instrument of domination and spiritual authority can become one of the mechanisms through which access, dependency and silence are created.

The central formula of this part of the book is therefore:

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY + DEPENDENCY + SPIRITUAL TRUST + LIMITED EXIT + SEXUAL ACCESS = A DISTINCT ENVIRONMENT OF ABUSE RISK

Where the evidence establishes actual exploitation, the book will call it abuse.

Where the evidence establishes only sexual misconduct, it will call it misconduct.

Where coercion remains uncertain, the uncertainty must remain visible.

But the institutional structure itself is already clear.

The victim does not have to be a child for religious power to be abused.

And the history of Catholic sexual abuse cannot be understood fully until **women religious and other dependent adults are placed inside the same institutional history rather than treated as an exceptional footnote.**

Sant'Ambrogio: The Convent Scandal

The Sant'Ambrogio affair occupies a crucial position in the history reconstructed in this book because it demonstrates that sexual and spiritual abuse within Catholic religious communities was not a phenomenon that suddenly appeared in the twentieth or twenty-first century. The case concerns a **nineteenth-century closed female religious community** in Rome in which spiritual authority, confession, obedience, alleged sexual manipulation, claims of supernatural experience and institutional secrecy became intertwined. It therefore provides an unusually clear historical bridge between the earlier history of religious women and the modern cases involving adult nuns.

At the center of the case was the convent of **Sant'Ambrogio**, a female religious institution whose internal world was governed by a strict hierarchy. The material identifies **Katharina von Hohenzollern** as the aristocratic religious woman whose denunciation triggered the investigation, **Maria Luisa** as the abbess or central authority figure within the convent narrative, **Maria Agnese Firrao** as a central figure in the alleged false-sainthood and mystical environment, and **Giuseppe Maria Mignani** as a priest and confessor associated with the religious environment. The eventual investigation reached ecclesiastical authorities and the **Roman Inquisition**, making the case particularly important for understanding how the Church itself responded when allegations emerged inside a closed religious institution.

The first feature that must be understood is the **enclosure**. Sant'Ambrogio was not an ordinary Catholic parish in which people came and went freely. It was a women's religious community governed by religious obedience and restricted outside contact. That institutional arrangement is central to the case because it created a world in which spiritual authority was concentrated among a relatively small number of people, while the women living inside depended upon that structure for their religious lives.

This was the basic environment:

CLOSED CONVENT
↓
RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY
↓
OBEDIENCE
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
CONFESSION
↓
DEPENDENCY

↓

POSSIBILITY OF SEXUAL OR SPIRITUAL MANIPULATION

The importance of this structure is not that enclosure automatically produces abuse. Our material explicitly rejects such a generalization. The point is that enclosure can create a particular institutional vulnerability: the people inside depend heavily upon the authority of those who govern the community, while outsiders have less opportunity to observe what takes place within it. The historical investigation identified this as one of the recurring institutional problems connecting medieval convents with modern religious communities.

Sant'Ambrogio is especially important because the alleged misconduct was not presented simply as ordinary sexual behavior. The case involved **spiritual manipulation**. Religious claims, mystical experiences and assertions of supernatural authority became intertwined with the hierarchy of the convent. The investigation therefore has to be understood not merely as a sexual scandal but as a case involving the potential misuse of religious belief itself.

At the heart of this environment was **Maria Agnese Firrao**. The material identifies her as a central figure in the false-sainthood and mystical environment surrounding the case. This aspect of the story is important because religious authority could be reinforced by claims of extraordinary holiness. A person regarded as specially favored by God could acquire influence beyond the ordinary authority granted by an institutional position. Belief in visions, revelations, miraculous gifts or special spiritual powers could therefore become another source of dependence.

The material connects Sant'Ambrogio directly with this mechanism:

SUPERNATURAL CLAIMS
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
TRUST / VENERATION
↓
OBEDIENCE
↓
CONTROL OVER FOLLOWERS

The false-sanctity element matters because it demonstrates how difficult it could be to distinguish ordinary institutional authority from extraordinary spiritual authority. If a superior was believed to possess special access to God, then questioning her could become much more than questioning an administrator. It could be experienced as questioning a divinely sanctioned figure.

That is why the case belongs in this book's history of **spiritual abuse**.

The material describes Sant'Ambrogio as involving **sexual relationships or coercion, spiritual authority, confession, supernatural claims, institutional hierarchy and religious obedience**. It specifically identifies the case as a conceptual predecessor to the modern Rupnik case. The connection is not that the two cases are identical. They are separated by more than a century and involve entirely different people and circumstances. The connection is that both demonstrate how sexual exploitation can become intertwined with spiritual authority.

The role of confession is particularly important.

Confession created an exceptionally intimate relationship between religious authority and the individual believer. The confessor could hear information that the woman would not ordinarily disclose to family, friends or outsiders. In a closed religious community, this spiritual relationship could become even more significant because the confessor was not merely a religious adviser operating outside the institution. He could be closely connected with the community itself.

The Sant'Ambrogio case therefore belongs to the historical chain already identified:

CONFESSION → INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE → SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY → DEPENDENCY → POSSIBILITY OF EXPLOITATION.

This does not mean that confession itself caused the scandal. It means that the institution of confession formed part of the environment in which authority and private knowledge intersected.

The case also demonstrates that sexual misconduct could involve more than one person or one direction of authority. The material specifically warns us not to attach the label **"sexual abuser"** indiscriminately to every person named in the Sant'Ambrogio investigation. The case is complicated by allegations, testimony, counter-allegations, false sanctity and the inquisitorial process. The precise role of each person must therefore be distinguished rather than turning every participant in the investigation into a perpetrator.

That caution is particularly important for **Maria Luisa**. She occupies a central position in the convent narrative, but the material treats the case as complicated and records allegations and competing accounts rather than presenting every accusation as an established fact. This is exactly the kind of historical distinction that must be maintained throughout this book: the existence of a scandal and an official investigation establishes that serious allegations existed; it does not mean that every allegation against every participant was ultimately proven.

The same applies to the priests associated with the convent. The material identifies **Giuseppe Maria Mignani** as a priest and confessor connected with

the religious environment and identifies the ecclesiastical investigators as a separate category. Their presence demonstrates the importance of the priest-confessor within the institutional structure, but their precise individual responsibility must be determined from the evidence concerning each person.

The investigation itself is one of the most important parts of the story.

The scandal did not simply disappear inside the convent. **Katharina von Hohenzollern's denunciation triggered an investigation**, eventually bringing the matter into the jurisdiction of the Roman ecclesiastical authorities and the Roman Inquisition. This makes Sant'Ambrogio especially valuable for our institutional history because it provides evidence of a Catholic authority confronting allegations of sexual and spiritual misconduct within a female religious institution.

The institutional pathway can therefore be reconstructed as:

CONVENT
↓
ALLEGATIONS / DENUNCIATION
↓
ECCLESIASTICAL INVESTIGATION
↓
ROMAN INQUISITION
↓
EXAMINATION OF TESTIMONY AND CONDUCT

The importance of this pathway is considerable. It demonstrates that the Church was not merely an outside observer of sexual misconduct within religious communities. It possessed its own mechanisms for investigating allegations and judging religious conduct. The Roman Inquisition could investigate claims involving religious belief, false sanctity, sexual misconduct and violations of institutional discipline.

Sant'Ambrogio therefore also provides an early example of the **jurisdictional system** examined later in this book. The Church had its own institutional machinery through which it could investigate and discipline people under ecclesiastical authority. That system was different from modern criminal justice, but it nevertheless represented a form of internal institutional accountability.

The case is especially revealing because the allegations were connected to religious claims. False sanctity was not simply a personal eccentricity. If a person falsely claimed supernatural powers, received veneration as a holy figure or used supposed mystical experiences to exercise authority over other religious women, the matter became an ecclesiastical problem involving the integrity of the religious institution itself.

The material therefore places **false sanctity** alongside sexual and spiritual manipulation.

The resulting structure becomes:

FALSE SANCTITY
+
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
+
CONFESSION
+
OBEDIENCE
+
CLOSED COMMUNITY
+
SEXUAL MISCONDUCT / COERCION

SANT'AMBROGIO SCANDAL

This combination explains why the case has survived as an important historical example.

It is not merely a story about sexual relationships inside a convent.

It is a story about what can happen when **religious authority itself becomes part of the mechanism of sexual or psychological control**.

This is the same reason the case has such importance for understanding adult victims. A woman living inside a religious institution could be an adult and still occupy a profoundly dependent position. Her religious superior could influence her life. Her confessor could exercise spiritual authority. Her community could determine her daily environment. Her belief system could make the authority figure's claims especially powerful.

The question therefore becomes not simply:

"Was she an adult?"

It becomes:

"Who possessed authority over her?"

"What did obedience require?"

"Who controlled her religious environment?"

"Who heard her confession?"

"Who could she challenge?"

"What happened when she challenged the authority?"

These are precisely the questions that later become important in modern cases involving women religious.

The Sant'Ambrogio affair consequently gives us an early example of the distinction between **sexual misconduct and sexual exploitation**. Our investigation has deliberately separated several categories: consensual adult sexual relationships, clerical concubinage, sexual exploitation involving power or dependency, sexual assault involving lack of consent, rape, prostitution, trafficking and institutional cover-up. These categories cannot simply be merged.

That distinction is particularly necessary here because the historical record contains allegations and competing testimony. A nineteenth-century religious scandal cannot be converted automatically into a list of modern criminal categories. The appropriate approach is to identify what the historical investigation established and what remains contested.

What is established within our material is that **Sant'Ambrogio became the subject of a serious ecclesiastical investigation involving false sanctity, sexual and spiritual allegations, religious authority, confession and the internal hierarchy of a female convent**. The case eventually reached the Roman Inquisition.

What the material does not permit us to do responsibly is assign every allegation to every named person as an established fact.

That distinction actually makes the case stronger as history.

The scandal was serious enough to generate an institutional investigation.

The investigation involved testimony.

The case involved competing allegations and counter-allegations.

Religious authority was central.

Sexual misconduct was part of the accusations.

And the Roman Inquisition became the institution responsible for examining the matter.

The case therefore provides direct evidence of the **intersection of sexuality and religious governance**.

It also illustrates an important paradox concerning enclosure.

The Church could respond to concerns about sexual misconduct by increasing restrictions around religious women. Enclosure could be presented as a way to protect religious women from outside sexual influence. Yet the more enclosed a community became, the more difficult it could become for

outsiders to observe what happened inside. The material identifies this as a recurring institutional paradox in the history of religious women.

That paradox is essential to understanding Sant'Ambrogio.

PROTECTION

↓

ENCLOSURE

↓

LESS OUTSIDE ACCESS

↓

GREATER INTERNAL DEPENDENCY

↓

POTENTIALLY LESS EXTERNAL SCRUTINY

The structure does not prove that enclosure causes abuse. It demonstrates why enclosure can have two opposite effects: it can protect members from outside dangers while simultaneously making independent observation more difficult.

Sant'Ambrogio therefore becomes a bridge between the medieval and modern histories.

The medieval evidence already shows relationships between nuns and clerics, sexual misconduct, illegitimate births, searches for escaped nuns and episcopal investigations. It also shows increasing concern with controlling women's sexuality and increasing enclosure. Sant'Ambrogio then provides a particularly detailed nineteenth-century example in which **closed community, spiritual hierarchy, confession, sexuality and ecclesiastical investigation** appear together.

The modern period then produces new examples in which the vocabulary changes but the underlying institutional questions return.

Sant'Ambrogio

→ closed female religious community

→ spiritual authority

→ confession

→ alleged sexual/spiritual manipulation

→ institutional investigation

↓

Rupnik

→ adult women / former nuns

→ spiritual authority

→ psychological dependency

→ alleged sexual exploitation

→ Jesuit and Vatican proceedings

The two cases must not be treated as identical. The material explicitly uses Sant'Ambrogio as a **conceptual bridge**, not as proof of a continuous conspiracy or uninterrupted organization.

That distinction is fundamental to the historical argument.

We are not claiming that a single sexual-abuse organization existed from the nineteenth century into the twenty-first.

We are identifying recurring **institutional conditions**.

Those conditions include:

closed religious communities

hierarchical authority

religious obedience

confession

spiritual dependency

claims of supernatural authority

sexual relationships or alleged coercion

internal secrecy

limited outside contact

ecclesiastical investigation

The recurrence of these elements is what makes Sant'Ambrogio historically significant.

It also changes the way the modern abuse crisis must be interpreted. If sexual exploitation of adult women can occur through religious authority, then a historical investigation focused exclusively on children misses an important part of the institutional picture. Our material explicitly identifies four branches of adult religious abuse: **priest → nun; superior → nun; spiritual director → adult; and religious founder → followers**.

Sant'Ambrogio belongs principally to the first two and third categories, depending upon the particular relationship being examined.

This is why women religious must be treated as a distinct victim population in the history of Catholic abuse.

They could be adults.

They could be educated.

They could have voluntarily entered religious life.

And yet they could still be subject to powerful forms of dependency.

The existence of a religious vocation does not eliminate vulnerability.

The existence of adulthood does not eliminate abuse of authority.

And the existence of consent to enter a convent does not constitute consent to every act subsequently imposed by someone exercising authority inside it.

At the same time, the historical record requires the opposite caution: **not every sexual relationship involving a nun and a priest was necessarily rape or coercion**. Our material explicitly warns against converting every historical sexual relationship into a modern category of sexual assault. The evidence for coercion must be established case by case.

Sant'Ambrogio is valuable precisely because it forces us to maintain both principles simultaneously.

We must recognize the documented sexual and coercive dimensions of the scandal.

But we must not manufacture certainty where the historical record contains allegations, competing testimony and unresolved questions.

This approach also distinguishes the Sant'Ambrogio investigation from sensational stories about medieval or early-modern "whore convents." Our material warns that the existence of prostitution or individual sexual scandals does not establish that convents generally operated as brothels. The strongest historical evidence comes from specific institutional records and investigations rather than generalized stories about supposedly sexually corrupt nuns.

Sant'Ambrogio is therefore important because it is a **specific documented scandal**, not because it allows us to make sweeping claims about all Catholic women religious.

The institutional response is itself part of the story.

A denunciation was made.

The allegations entered an ecclesiastical process.

Witness testimony and counter-allegations became relevant.

The religious hierarchy became subject to scrutiny.

The Roman Inquisition became involved.

And the case became part of the institutional record.

This is the historical predecessor of the modern question:

What happens when the institution responsible for religious authority must investigate misconduct occurring inside one of its own communities?

Sant'Ambrogio demonstrates that this question is not new.

The Church had long possessed mechanisms for internal investigation.

The problem was never simply the absence of an institution capable of responding.

The more difficult issue was **what that institution considered proven, how it interpreted sexual misconduct, what jurisdiction it exercised, how much information it possessed, and what happened to the people involved afterward**.

That is precisely why the Sant'Ambrogio case belongs in this book's institutional history rather than being presented merely as an exotic nineteenth-century scandal.

It demonstrates that the relationship between **sexuality and religious authority** was already capable of producing institutional crises within female religious communities long before the modern Catholic abuse crisis became publicly visible.

And it demonstrates something even more important.

The central problem was not simply sexuality.

It was **power over sexuality**.

A religious superior could influence the life of a nun.

A confessor could exercise spiritual authority.

A supposed mystic could acquire extraordinary obedience.

A closed community could restrict outside access.

And an ecclesiastical tribunal could ultimately decide how the allegations were interpreted and punished.

The entire system therefore revolved around authority.

WHO HAD POWER?

WHO DEPENDED ON WHOM?

WHO COULD SPEAK?

WHO COULD BE BELIEVED?

WHO CONTROLLED THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY?

WHO CONTROLLED THE INVESTIGATION?

These are the questions that make Sant'Ambrogio relevant to the present.

The nineteenth-century scandal is therefore not evidence that all Catholic convents were abusive. It is evidence of something much more precise and historically defensible: **a closed Catholic women's community could become the setting for an extraordinary conflict in which spiritual authority, claims of holiness, confession, religious obedience, alleged sexual misconduct and institutional secrecy became inseparable enough to require intervention by the highest ecclesiastical investigative machinery.**

That is why Sant'Ambrogio stands at the center of the history of adult religious abuse.

It gives us the older structure before the modern terminology existed.

It shows the religious woman not merely as a passive member of the Church, but as a person whose entire life could exist within a hierarchy of spiritual dependence.

And it gives us the historical bridge to the modern cases in which women religious again reported that **spiritual authority itself had become an instrument of sexual exploitation**.

The names, institutions and centuries changed.

The institutional question did not.

When spiritual authority becomes absolute, and when the person subjected to it has limited freedom to challenge the authority, sexuality can become another field in which power is exercised.

Sant'Ambrogio is one of the clearest historical demonstrations of that problem contained in our material.

Power Behind the Convent Walls

The Sant'Ambrogio scandal reveals that the decisive element was not simply that sexual conduct occurred inside a convent. What made the case so

significant was the **concentration of religious power inside a closed community**: spiritual authority, obedience, confession, claims of supernatural favor and restricted outside contact could reinforce one another. The material identifies precisely this combination as the institutional structure that makes Sant'Ambrogio important to the wider history of sexual and spiritual abuse.

The first mechanism was **obedience**. A religious woman did not enter the convent merely as a resident; she entered a hierarchical religious institution in which obedience formed part of the structure of her vocation. Superiors possessed authority over the internal life of the community, while members were expected to accept religious discipline and direction. In Sant'Ambrogio, this meant that challenging the authority of a superior was not equivalent to disagreeing with an ordinary administrator: it could mean challenging someone who occupied a recognized spiritual position within the woman's religious world.

That distinction is essential. The institutional hierarchy could make authority appear legitimate before any question of misconduct arose. A superior did not have to establish power through physical force. The position itself carried authority, and religious obedience gave that authority a moral and spiritual dimension. The danger arose when legitimate authority could be converted into personal control.

The Sant'Ambrogio structure can therefore be represented as:

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY
↓
SUPERIOR
↓
RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
DEPENDENCE

Once dependency existed, the consequences of challenging the superior became greater. The woman was not simply challenging a person; she could be challenging the person through whom she understood part of her religious life.

The second mechanism was **spiritual direction**. The material repeatedly places spiritual authority at the center of the Sant'Ambrogio story. The convent contained relationships involving confessors, spiritual guidance and religious instruction. This gave certain people access not merely to the ordinary activities of the women but to their inner religious lives.

Confession made that relationship particularly intimate. A confessor could hear matters that a woman might reveal to nobody else. The priest occupied a position that combined sacramental authority with privileged knowledge of the penitent's fears, doubts, sexuality and conscience. In the historical material, clerics associated with convents could therefore exercise both **sexual influence and sacramental authority**, including the ability to hear women's confessions.

This produces a particularly powerful structure:

CONFESSION
↓
PRIVATE KNOWLEDGE
↓
SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
DEPENDENCY
↓
POSSIBLE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The significance is not that confession inherently produces abuse. Nothing in our material supports such a conclusion. The significance is that confession could give a person exercising religious authority unusually intimate access to another person's conscience and private life.

Sant'Ambrogio demonstrates how this could become intertwined with other forms of power. The case involved not merely confession but also claims concerning **supernatural experiences and holiness**. Maria Agnese Firrao occupies a central position in the material's account of the alleged false-sainthood and mystical environment. The religious significance attributed to such claims could strengthen the authority of people believed to possess extraordinary spiritual status.

This is the third mechanism:

CLAIM OF SUPERNATURAL AUTHORITY

↓

PERCEIVED SPECIAL ACCESS TO THE DIVINE

↓

GREATER SPIRITUAL CREDIBILITY

↓

GREATER OBEDIENCE

↓

GREATER DIFFICULTY OF CHALLENGE

The importance of false sanctity is therefore institutional as well as theological. If someone is believed to be specially favored by God, receiving supernatural communications or possessing extraordinary spiritual gifts, ordinary skepticism can become difficult. A person challenging such an authority may fear that she is not merely questioning another human being but resisting something presented as divinely sanctioned.

That is particularly powerful inside a closed religious community.

Outside the convent, a claim of supernatural authority might encounter many competing sources of information. Inside the convent, the authority could be reinforced by the community itself. The women lived within the same religious environment, heard the same teachings and were subject to the same hierarchy. The institution could therefore become an echo chamber in which spiritual claims acquired additional force.

This does not establish that everyone in Sant'Ambrogio believed every claim or that every member of the convent participated in manipulation. The historical material itself contains allegations, counter-allegations and a complicated inquisitorial process. The correct conclusion is narrower: **claims of supernatural authority formed part of the environment in which authority and obedience operated**.

The fourth mechanism was **isolation**.

The convent was a closed female religious community. Contact with the outside world was restricted by the very nature of the institution. That enclosure was not necessarily designed to facilitate abuse; historically, enclosure was also presented as protection for religious women. But our material identifies a crucial institutional paradox: a measure intended to protect women from sexual exploitation could simultaneously make independent outside scrutiny more difficult.

The paradox can be expressed simply:

PROTECTION

↓

ENCLOSURE

↓

RESTRICTED OUTSIDE CONTACT

↓

GREATER INTERNAL DEPENDENCY

↓

LESS EXTERNAL OBSERVATION

This is one of the most important findings emerging from the historical material.

Enclosure can protect.

Enclosure can also isolate.

Those two propositions are not contradictory.

The significance of Sant'Ambrogio is that the closed environment meant that the religious hierarchy possessed enormous influence over the women inside. If something went wrong, the person experiencing it could not necessarily rely upon the same ordinary network of family, friends, colleagues and outside institutions available to someone living in an open society.

This brings us to the fifth mechanism: **the difficulty of challenging a supposedly holy superior**.

Ordinary institutional authority can be challenged by appealing to another authority. But what happens when the person being challenged is regarded as exceptionally holy? The challenge becomes more complicated because the authority is reinforced by religious interpretation.

In Sant'Ambrogio, the material describes a world in which alleged supernatural claims and religious authority became intertwined. A supposedly holy person could command trust precisely because she was believed to possess unusual spiritual legitimacy. A woman who questioned such a figure therefore faced a potential conflict between her own experience and the religious interpretation imposed upon it.

The problem can be represented as:

PERSON EXPERIENCES SOMETHING WRONG

↓

AUTHORITY PROVIDES RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION

↓

RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION CONFLICTS WITH EXPERIENCE

↓

CHALLENGE TO AUTHORITY BECOMES A SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE

↓

DISCLOSURE BECOMES MORE DIFFICULT

This is the heart of **spiritual coercion**.

It does not necessarily require physical confinement or explicit threats.

A person can be controlled by the belief that the authority figure speaks for God.

The Sant'Ambrogio material makes this especially important because the scandal involved alleged sexual conduct alongside spiritual manipulation and claims of holiness. The sexual dimension therefore cannot be separated completely from the religious dimension. The alleged sexual exploitation occurred within a structure that had already established spiritual dependency.

This is what makes the case conceptually different from an ordinary affair between two adults.

Our investigation deliberately distinguishes several categories:

consensual adult sexual relationship

clerical concubinage

sexual exploitation involving power or dependency

sexual assault

rape

institutional concealment

These categories must not be collapsed. A sexual relationship between an adult nun and a priest is not automatically proof of rape or coercion. At the same time, an adult relationship cannot automatically be assumed to have been entirely free of coercion simply because both people were adults. The relevant question is the evidence concerning **power, dependency and consent**.

Sant'Ambrogio is important because the institutional environment provides exactly the circumstances in which that question becomes unavoidable.

The woman is living under religious authority.

The community is enclosed.

Obedience is part of the vocation.

Confession creates intimate access.

Spiritual direction reinforces dependency.

Claims of holiness reinforce credibility.

And challenging the authority can mean challenging the religious order itself.

This produces the distinctive Sant'Ambrogio structure:

ENCLOSURE + OBEDIENCE + CONFESSION + SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY + SUPERNATURAL CLAIMS + DEPENDENCY

The sexual allegations become part of that larger system.

The institutional investigation then becomes the sixth mechanism.

Katharina von Hohenzollern's denunciation broke through the closed structure. Her position is particularly significant because she was not simply an anonymous external critic. She had spent approximately **fifteen months as the novice Luisa Maria inside Sant'Ambrogio**, and according to the material her knowledge of the convent's secrets placed her in danger. Her denunciation ultimately triggered the investigation.

This makes her role fundamentally different from someone hearing rumors from outside.

She had been inside.

She had experienced the institution.

She possessed knowledge of its internal practices.

And she brought that knowledge beyond its walls.

The resulting investigation eventually reached the **Roman Inquisition**, providing an example of an ecclesiastical institution investigating misconduct within another Catholic religious institution. The material's contents describe separate stages of the process, including the informative process, interrogation of the Madre Vicaria, evidence and first confessions, investigation of sexual abuse, interrogations of confessors and the abbess, and ultimately a verdict and its consequences.

This demonstrates that Sant'Ambrogio was not merely a scandal preserved in later historical memory. It became an actual institutional proceeding.

The investigation examined testimony.

It examined confessions.

It interrogated religious authorities.

It examined the conduct of confessors.

It considered claims concerning sanctity.

And it eventually produced a verdict.

That matters because it provides a documented example of the Catholic institution confronting allegations concerning sexual and spiritual misconduct within a closed female community.

The case also reveals a paradox concerning **secrecy**. The Church possessed mechanisms capable of investigating the convent, but the investigation itself operated through an ecclesiastical hierarchy with its own confidentiality and secrecy. The material's discussion of Sant'Ambrogio specifically refers to **internal abjurations and external secrecy**, demonstrating that even when the institution investigated the scandal, information did not necessarily become publicly transparent.

This produces another important distinction:

INVESTIGATION ≠ PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY

An institution can investigate internally while controlling who receives the information and what becomes public.

That observation connects Sant'Ambrogio directly to the modern Vatican system.

In the modern period, our investigation repeatedly encounters the distinction between **institutional knowledge and public knowledge**. A bishop may know about an allegation without the public knowing. A religious order may investigate internally without publishing its records. The Vatican may receive a case without making the complete file public. A canonical proceeding can therefore exist without functioning like an open criminal trial.

Sant'Ambrogio provides the historical precedent for that institutional distinction.

The case also demonstrates the importance of **information control**. Within a closed community, the people controlling religious authority can also influence how information circulates. A person who challenges the official interpretation may therefore face not only spiritual pressure but social consequences inside the community.

This is why the historical material treats **limited outside contact** as one of the important mechanisms. It does not claim that every convent deliberately suppressed abuse. It identifies a structural condition: the fewer independent observers there are, the greater the institution's control over its own internal information.

That leads to a broader formula:

CLOSED COMMUNITY

-

CENTRALIZED AUTHORITY

-

LIMITED OUTSIDE CONTACT

=

GREATER INTERNAL CONTROL OF INFORMATION

When sexual misconduct occurs inside such a structure, exposure depends heavily upon someone being willing and able to break the informational barrier.

Katharina's denunciation demonstrates precisely that process.

The significance of her action becomes even clearer when we consider the institutional consequences of leaving. The medieval material preceding Sant'Ambrogio contains documented cases in which religious authorities sought to locate and return women who escaped convents. In the case of **Agnes of St. Michael's Convent in Stamford**, the bishop ordered the prioress to have her brought back and kept in custody and solitude, threatening the prioress with excommunication if she failed to comply. The material explicitly cautions that this does not prove sexual abuse, but it demonstrates that ecclesiastical authorities possessed mechanisms for retrieving women who left religious communities.

That historical fact is important because it shows that enclosure could involve more than physical separation from society. Religious institutions could possess mechanisms for enforcing continued membership.

The broader structure was therefore:

ENTER RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

↓

TAKE VOWS

↓

BECOME SUBJECT TO SUPERIORS

↓

LIVE WITHIN ENCLOSURE

↓

DEPEND UPON THE INSTITUTION

↓

LEAVING BECOMES DIFFICULT

The material does not claim that every woman was forcibly prevented from leaving. It demonstrates that institutional mechanisms for controlling departure existed historically. That makes dependency a concrete institutional issue rather than an abstract psychological concept.

Sant'Ambrogio also fits into a much longer history of sexual relationships between clerics and women religious. The medieval evidence examined in our material records relationships between nuns and **vicars, chaplains and chantry priests**, with some chaplains actually living on convent premises. These clerics could exercise both sexual influence and sacramental authority.

That earlier evidence provides the structural background:

CLERIC

↓

ACCESS TO CONVENT

↓

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

↓

SACRAMENTAL AUTHORITY

↓

SEXUAL ACCESS

↓

RELIGIOUS CONSEQUENCES

The significance is not that every such relationship was abusive. The material explicitly warns against that conclusion. The importance is that the institutional arrangement could combine **sexual access and religious authority in the same person**.

Sant'Ambrogio intensifies this structure by adding the claims of supernatural authority and the closed institutional environment.

That is why it provides such a powerful bridge to the modern case of **Marko Rupnik**.

Rupnik's allegations involve adult women and former religious sisters, rather than primarily children. The material describes allegations of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse and identifies the alleged mechanism as:

spiritual authority

↓

manipulation

↓

conscience

↓

religious justification

↓

sexual exploitation

The resemblance to Sant'Ambrogio is therefore conceptual.

In both cases, the important question is not simply whether sexual conduct occurred.

It is whether **religious authority was used as part of the mechanism through which sexual exploitation became possible**.

This is why the Vatican's modern consideration of **"spiritual abuse" as a distinct canonical crime** is so significant to our historical argument. The proposal specifically concerns situations in which supposed mystical or spiritual experiences are used to exert control over people. The terminology is modern, but the underlying institutional problem has a much older history.

Sant'Ambrogio therefore becomes the historical predecessor of a concept that the modern Church is only now attempting to define more precisely.

SUPERNATURAL CLAIMS

↓

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

↓

CONTROL OF CONSCIENCE

↓

DEPENDENCY

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The later case of Rupnik shows that this structure did not disappear with modernization.

The same is true of **religious founders**. The material identifies another branch of adult religious abuse involving **religious founder → followers**, alongside priest → nun, superior → nun and spiritual director → adult.

This means that the institutional problem is not confined to one specific office.

A bishop can possess authority.

A priest can possess authority.

A confessor can possess authority.

A superior can possess authority.

A founder can possess authority.

A supposed mystic can possess authority.

The specific title changes.

The structural question remains:

How much authority does the person possess, and how dependent is the other person upon it?

That is why the Sant'Ambrogio case belongs at the center of this part of the book.

It demonstrates the relationship between **religious authority and vulnerability** before modern concepts such as "spiritual abuse" existed.

It demonstrates how a closed community can intensify dependence.

It demonstrates how claims of supernatural authority can reinforce obedience.

It demonstrates how confession can provide intimate access.

It demonstrates how challenging a supposedly holy person can become extraordinarily difficult.

And it demonstrates that the Church itself could eventually investigate such a system when a complainant broke through its internal boundaries.

The case therefore gives us a historical model:

CLOSED COMMUNITY

→ **OBEDIENCE**

→ **SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY**

→ **CONFESSION**

→ **SUPERNATURAL CLAIMS**

→ **DEPENDENCY**

→ **ALLEGED SEXUAL MANIPULATION**

→ **DENUNCIATION**

→ **ECCLESIASTICAL INVESTIGATION**

→ **VERDICT**

That sequence should not be read as proof that every element occurred identically for every person involved. The Sant'Ambrogio record is

complicated, and the material explicitly cautions that individual roles and accusations must be distinguished. But as an institutional case study, the combination is exceptionally revealing.

The greatest lesson is that **holiness can become a form of power**.

Religious institutions depend upon trust.

A superior is trusted because she is a superior.

A confessor is trusted because he is a priest.

A spiritual director is trusted because he is believed to guide a person's relationship with God.

A mystic is trusted because she is believed to possess special spiritual insight.

The problem arises when that trust becomes a mechanism through which the authority figure can control the person who trusts them.

In Sant'Ambrogio, the allegations and investigation show how closely these different forms of power could become intertwined.

This is also why the case should not be reduced to the sensational phrase **"sex in a convent."**

That description misses the institutional mechanism.

The deeper story is:

Who possessed authority?

Why was that authority believed?

How was obedience enforced?

How much outside contact existed?

Who controlled spiritual interpretation?

Who could challenge the supposedly holy person?

What happened when someone finally did challenge her?

Those questions reveal the power behind the convent walls.

And the answers explain why the Sant'Ambrogio scandal matters more than its nineteenth-century setting might initially suggest.

It is a historical demonstration that **sexual exploitation of religious women could become inseparable from the structures of religious authority themselves**. The modern vocabulary may now include "spiritual abuse," "abuse of authority" and "vulnerable adults," but the underlying problem—**a dependent religious person confronting an authority figure whose**

power is reinforced by spiritual legitimacy and institutional isolation—is much older.

Sant'Ambrogio therefore becomes the essential bridge between the historical and modern sections of this book:

medieval religious enclosure → Sant'Ambrogio → modern spiritual abuse → Rupnik.

The institutions changed.

The terminology changed.

The centuries changed.

But the institutional question remained remarkably recognizable:

What happens when the person who controls the spiritual world of another person also acquires the power to control that person's body, sexuality, conscience and ability to challenge the authority?

That is the power behind the convent walls.

Sexual Abuse, Spiritual Abuse and Manipulation

The material assembled in our investigation shows that sexual abuse within Catholic and Christian religious environments cannot always be understood as a simple physical act committed by one person against another. In a number of the cases examined, the alleged sexual exploitation was intertwined with **spiritual authority, psychological manipulation, control of conscience, religious justification, dependency and institutional power**. The resulting phenomenon is therefore simultaneously sexual, psychological and institutional: the sexual conduct cannot be fully understood without examining the religious relationship in which it occurred.

This distinction is particularly important in cases involving **adult women and women religious**. An adult victim is not necessarily an independent participant in a relationship simply because she has reached adulthood. Where a priest, spiritual director, religious superior or charismatic founder possesses authority over her religious life, the relationship may contain a profound imbalance of power. The material identifies this as one of the defining features of the adult-abuse network: **the key variable is not simply the victim's age, but dependency on religious authority**.

The basic mechanism emerging from the investigation is:

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY
↓

SPIRITUAL DEPENDENCY
↓
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTROL
↓
RELIGIOUS / MORAL JUSTIFICATION
↓
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

This is different from an ordinary case of sexual predation because the perpetrator allegedly uses more than physical access. The person's religious position itself becomes part of the mechanism. Spiritual guidance can become manipulation; religious instruction can become control; the language of sin and obedience can become a means of influencing the victim; and the victim's own religious commitment can become a source of vulnerability.

The material specifically identifies **spiritual coercion, abuse of confession, manipulation of religious vows, sexual exploitation of nuns, abuse of seminarians, institutional intimidation, retaliation against complainants, financial dependency and manipulation of victims' understanding of sin and obedience** as components of the broader abuse system.

These mechanisms do not necessarily appear together in every case. They represent the wider range of ways in which religious authority can become entangled with sexual exploitation. The individual cases must therefore be examined separately, while the recurring mechanisms can be compared across them.

The first of these mechanisms is **spiritual dependency**.

A person seeking religious guidance may voluntarily place substantial trust in a spiritual director. In the material concerning Marko Rupnik, for example, Gloria first encountered him as a spiritual guide while she was a young woman discerning her religious future. The account describes how this position gave him access to her insecurities, fears and vulnerabilities and how his reputation as a charismatic spiritual figure reinforced his authority.

The relationship therefore began with something legitimate: spiritual guidance.

That is precisely what makes the alleged subsequent manipulation significant.

The structure described in the material is:

YOUNG WOMAN SEEKING SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

↓

CHARISMATIC SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

↓

DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL VULNERABILITIES

↓

TRUST

↓

INCREASED DEPENDENCY

↓

ALLEGED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The authority did not have to be imposed initially through force. It could develop through trust.

That distinction is essential.

A spiritual director is expected to understand the person's religious concerns. A person seeking guidance may deliberately reveal fears, insecurities, doubts and intimate aspects of her life. The relationship therefore naturally produces a degree of psychological openness. If that openness is then allegedly exploited for sexual purposes, the spiritual relationship itself becomes part of the mechanism of abuse.

The material concerning Rupnik describes exactly this progression. Gloria regarded him as a spiritual guide and became involved in his artistic and religious environment. According to her testimony, he gradually emphasized their personal contact and exploited her vulnerabilities. The alleged abuse therefore developed inside a relationship that had originally been presented as spiritual formation.

This is why the concept of **spiritual abuse** matters.

The Vatican itself began considering whether spiritual abuse should become a distinct canonical crime. The material records that the initiative concerned situations in which supposed mystical or spiritual experiences are used to exert control over people. The significance is that the Church was beginning to recognize that abuse could occur not merely through sexual acts but through the **misuse of spiritual authority itself**.

The concept can therefore be separated into two stages.

SPIRITUAL MANIPULATION

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The first is not merely background to the second.

It may be the mechanism that makes the second possible.

The material's formulation concerning Rupnik is particularly clear:

spiritual authority → manipulation → conscience → religious justification → sexual exploitation.

This sequence explains why spiritual abuse deserves separate treatment.

A victim may know that an ordinary sexual advance is inappropriate and resist it immediately. But when the same conduct is presented by a trusted spiritual authority as part of religious development, spiritual intimacy, purification, obedience or some other religiously framed experience, resistance can become psychologically more complicated.

The material concerning Gloria describes Rupnik telling her that she should develop a particular kind of sexuality and making sexual demands while presenting his behavior within a framework of his authority over her. The account also describes his use of pornography and sexualized "formation." These allegations illustrate the transformation of religious authority into a mechanism for introducing and normalizing sexual behavior.

The same mechanism appears in the testimony of **Samuelle**. According to the account, Rupnik initially presented himself as someone who understood her artistic and religious aspirations better than her superiors did. She consequently felt understood and accepted and became integrated into the Centro Aletti artistic environment. Later, according to her testimony, he began telling her that she needed to be guided better and made comments about her femininity and appearance.

The significance of this progression is that the relationship did not begin with an openly sexual proposition.

It began with **recognition and trust**.

Then came **guidance**.

Then increased **personal influence**.

Then alleged **sexualization of the relationship**.

That progression is one of the most important mechanisms in the adult-abuse material.

The victim can initially experience the authority figure as someone who understands her better than other people do.

That perception can deepen dependency.

The authority figure can then become increasingly central to the person's emotional and religious life.

And once the relationship is deeply dependent, resistance can become more difficult.

This is why **psychological domination** must be distinguished from physical force.

The material does not claim that every case of spiritual manipulation involves physical violence. The alleged mechanisms can include persuasion, dependency, intimidation, guilt, religious justification, manipulation of conscience and exploitation of the victim's commitment to the religious community.

The victim may therefore remain physically capable of leaving while psychologically believing that leaving would mean abandoning God, her vocation, her community or the spiritual path she has committed herself to.

That is the particular danger of **religious dependency**.

Religious vows can intensify it.

A woman who has entered religious life may have committed herself to obedience and community life. Her identity may be deeply connected with her vocation. Her housing, work, friendships and spiritual formation may all be located within the religious institution. If the person exercising authority over her is also involved in her formation, her ability to challenge that person can be severely complicated.

The material specifically identifies **manipulation of religious vows** as part of the adult-abuse category.

This does not mean that religious vows themselves are abusive.

The issue is their potential exploitation.

A vow of obedience is intended as a religious commitment.

It can become a vulnerability if an authority figure uses obedience to demand something unrelated to legitimate religious discipline.

The distinction is therefore:

OBEDIENCE AS RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

versus

OBEDIENCE USED AS A TOOL OF PERSONAL CONTROL

The same applies to confession.

Confession is a religious sacrament and cannot simply be described as an abuse mechanism. But because confession gives the priest access to intimate information concerning the penitent's conscience and sexuality, the material

identifies **abuse of confession** as one of the mechanisms that can become relevant when religious authority is exploited.

The historical Sant'Ambrogio case provides the clearest earlier example of this intersection.

There, the material describes:

closed female community

-

spiritual authority

-

confession

-

obedience

-

supernatural claims

-

sexual manipulation

-

institutional hierarchy.

The significance of Sant'Ambrogio is therefore not simply that sexual misconduct was alleged in a convent. It is that sexuality became intertwined with the spiritual structures governing the women inside the convent.

This makes Sant'Ambrogio a direct historical predecessor to the modern concept of spiritual abuse.

The same structure can be observed in the modern Rupnik case, although the specific facts and circumstances are different:

SANT'AMBROGIO

closed community → spiritual authority → confession → obedience → alleged sexual manipulation

↓

RUPNIK

spiritual authority → psychological dependency → religious manipulation → alleged sexual exploitation.

The two cases are not identical and should never be presented as though they were. Their importance lies in the recurring mechanism rather than in a claim of continuous organization. The material specifically describes Sant'Ambrogio and Rupnik as belonging to the same **conceptual category** because sexual relationships, spiritual authority and religious dependency become intertwined.

The adult-abuse network becomes even broader when we include **L'Arche**.

The material describes an investigation into founder **Jean Vanier** and priest **Thomas Philippe**, concluding that women had been subjected to sexual and spiritual exploitation. The alleged abuse was associated with mystical or spiritual manipulation and continued amid secrecy. This produces another institutional configuration:

CHARISMATIC CHRISTIAN FOUNDER

↓

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

↓

ADULT WOMEN

↓

RELIGIOUS / MYSTICAL JUSTIFICATION

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

↓

SECRECY

↓

INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE

This case demonstrates why the phenomenon cannot be reduced to Catholic priests abusing children.

The broader network includes **charismatic founders, spiritual directors, priests, religious superiors and other people exercising authority within religious communities**.

The victim can be a child.

The victim can be a seminarian.

The victim can be an adult woman.

The victim can be a nun.

The victim can be another dependent member of a religious movement.

The common element is not simply age.

It is **power exercised through a religious relationship**.

The material consequently identifies four principal branches of adult religious abuse:

A. Priest → nun
Sexual exploitation of women religious.

B. Superior → nun
Abuse inside religious orders.

C. Spiritual director → adult
Sexual exploitation through confession or spiritual counselling.

D. Religious founder → followers
Charismatic authority combined with sexual exploitation.

This classification is important because it prevents all adult cases from being forced into the same pattern.

A priest can exploit a nun.

A superior can exploit a subordinate.

A spiritual director can exploit a person seeking guidance.

A charismatic founder can exploit followers.

The specific mechanism differs, but all can involve an unequal relationship of religious authority.

The material also emphasizes that the institutional system includes more than diocesan priests. The Vatican framework covers **members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life**, meaning that monks, brothers, nuns, sisters, religious superiors, seminary personnel and lay personnel operating within Catholic institutions can all become relevant to the institutional-abuse model.

This broadens the institutional map:

PRIESTS

BISHOPS

CARDINALS

MONKS

BROTHERS

NUNS

SISTERS

RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS

SEMINARY PERSONNEL

LAY PERSONNEL

The important question is not whether each category is inherently dangerous.

It is:

Which institutional environments repeatedly create relationships of dependency and authority that can be sexually exploited?

That is the question that connects the adult cases to the wider investigation.

The material also shows that sexual exploitation can coexist with **psychological abuse** and **institutional intimidation**. The alleged victim may be made to feel responsible for what is happening, may be told that resistance reflects a spiritual defect, or may fear the consequences of challenging a powerful religious figure. In such circumstances, the psychological dimension cannot be separated cleanly from the sexual dimension.

This is particularly evident in the Rupnik testimony included in the material. Samuelle described feeling increasingly unwell, unable to react, emptied out and treated like an object. When she resisted, she says Rupnik reproached her and told her she needed to have a "pure" view of what was happening.

The alleged mechanism is therefore not simply:

UNWANTED TOUCH

It is:

UNWANTED TOUCH

↓

AUTHORITY FIGURE REDEFINES THE ACT

↓

VICTIM'S RESISTANCE IS SPIRITUALLY REFRAMED

↓

CONFUSION / SUBMISSION

This is a particularly important form of manipulation because it attempts to change the victim's interpretation of her own experience.

The person says:

"I do not want this."

The authority figure responds, in effect:

"You misunderstand what this is."

The victim's own moral and spiritual framework is then turned against her.

That is the essence of **spiritual manipulation**.

It is not necessary to assume that every accusation involving spiritual language follows this pattern. But where testimony specifically describes the use of religious concepts to override resistance, the religious dimension becomes central to understanding the alleged abuse.

The material also describes situations in which secrecy was deliberately reinforced. In Samuelle's account, Rupnik allegedly instructed her not to be seen because people might gossip, while the meetings took place late at night.

Again, the significance is structural.

PRIVATE MEETINGS

↓

ISOLATION

↓

FEAR OF BEING SEEN

↓

SECRECY

↓

GREATER CONTROL

The material's broader institutional model identifies secrecy as one of the mechanisms through which abuse can remain hidden. In the adult cases, secrecy can be particularly effective because the relationship itself may appear legitimate from the outside. A priest meeting a religious woman can be described as spiritual counselling. An artist working with a nun can be described as professional collaboration. A founder meeting a follower can be described as spiritual direction.

The legitimate activity can therefore provide cover for alleged illegitimate conduct.

That is why **context** matters.

A meeting is not evidence of abuse.

A spiritual relationship is not evidence of abuse.

A confession is not evidence of abuse.

A religious vow is not evidence of abuse.

But when the evidence shows that these legitimate structures were allegedly used to obtain sexual access or exercise coercive control, they become part of the mechanism.

The material therefore calls for a distinction between **religious practice** and **religious exploitation**.

Religious authority itself is not abuse.

The misuse of that authority can be.

Spiritual direction itself is not abuse.

The sexual exploitation of a dependent person through spiritual direction can be.

Confession itself is not abuse.

Using confessional access or religious knowledge to manipulate a person sexually can be.

Religious obedience itself is not abuse.

Using vows of obedience to demand sexual submission can be.

These distinctions are necessary if the book is to present the findings rather than merely condemn the existence of religious institutions.

The same evidentiary discipline applies to accusations against institutions.

The material explicitly distinguishes:

direct abuse

from

institutional knowledge

from

structural responsibility.

A priest may personally commit abuse.

A superior may know about it.

An institution may have rules that determine how the complaint is handled.

These are three different levels of responsibility.

The adult-abuse cases therefore have to be analyzed at all three levels.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Who allegedly abused?

RELATIONAL LEVEL

How was spiritual authority used?

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Who knew, who investigated and who controlled the response?

The Rupnik case is especially important because it reaches all three levels.

At the individual level are the allegations concerning Rupnik.

At the relational level are the allegations of spiritual, psychological and sexual abuse involving women and former nuns.

At the institutional level are the Jesuit response and the later Vatican canonical process. The material states that the Jesuits expelled Rupnik in 2023 after finding the allegations highly credible, while the Vatican subsequently appointed a five-member judicial panel to conduct a canonical trial. As of July 2026, the Vatican said no final decision had been reached.

This institutional dimension is crucial because the adult victim's experience does not end with the alleged abuse.

After disclosure comes the question of **who controls the investigation**.

The material explicitly identifies this as a major issue in the Rupnik case:

Who controls the investigation?

Who controls the information?

Who decides when the public learns the result?

These are institutional questions, but they directly affect adult victims.

If the victim is already dependent upon a religious institution, then an internal investigation may place the victim once again inside a structure controlled by the institution. The person who has suffered alleged abuse must then navigate another authority system to obtain recognition.

This is why **institutional secrecy** becomes part of the adult-abuse story.

The material describes the modern Vatican framework as increasingly recognizing this problem. The 2023 revision of *Vos estis lux mundi* covers not only sexual abuse of minors but also **sexual acts involving abuse of authority, vulnerable adults and interference with investigations**.

This represents an important conceptual expansion.

The older public image was:

PRIEST → CHILD

The broader modern framework is:

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY → VULNERABLE PERSON

The vulnerable person may be a child.

The vulnerable person may be an adult.

The vulnerable person may be a nun.

The vulnerable person may be a seminarian.

The vulnerability may arise from age, but it may also arise from **dependency and authority**.

This is the central finding of this part of the investigation.

Sexual abuse can be physical.

It can also be psychological.

It can also be spiritual.

And in institutional religious environments, these forms can overlap.

A sexual act can be accompanied by psychological domination.

Psychological domination can be reinforced by religious authority.

Religious authority can be reinforced by vows.

Vows can reinforce institutional dependency.

Dependency can make disclosure more difficult.

Secrecy can then protect the institutional structure.

The resulting chain is:

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

↓

DEPENDENCY

↓

MANIPULATION

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

↓

SILENCE / FEAR

↓

INSTITUTIONAL HANDLING

This is not a claim that every religious sexual-abuse case follows this exact sequence. It is the recurring mechanism visible in the cases where sexual exploitation and spiritual authority overlap.

The material also shows why **adult abuse must not be treated as a secondary category**. The Vatican framework now explicitly encompasses vulnerable adults and abuse of authority. The Pontifical Commission's 2026 safeguarding discussions included **women religious, seminarians, priests and lay movements**, alongside institutional responsibility, justice and victims' rights.

The institutional scope has therefore expanded from:

children abused by priests

to:

vulnerable people subjected to abuse within religious systems of authority.

This is a fundamental shift.

It means that the investigation of Catholic sexual abuse must examine not only the age of victims but the **architecture of the relationship**.

Who had authority?

Who depended upon whom?

Who controlled access?

Who controlled spiritual interpretation?

Who controlled the institution?

Who controlled the complaint?

Who controlled the investigation?

And who ultimately controlled the information released to the outside world?

The answers determine whether an apparently ordinary religious relationship concealed an extraordinary imbalance of power.

The cases of Sant'Ambrogio, Rupnik and L'Arche demonstrate the breadth of the phenomenon. Sant'Ambrogio provides the historical example of a closed female religious community in which spiritual authority, confession, obedience, supernatural claims and alleged sexual manipulation became intertwined. Rupnik provides the modern example involving adult women and former nuns, where spiritual authority, psychological dependency and alleged sexual exploitation intersect. L'Arche extends the model beyond Catholic

priests to a charismatic Christian founder and spiritual authority over adult women.

These cases are not identical.

They do not involve the same institutions.

They do not involve the same centuries.

They do not involve the same religious structures.

But they demonstrate the same fundamental possibility:

religious authority can become an instrument of sexual exploitation.

That is the point at which sexual abuse becomes **spiritual abuse**.

And once that happens, the abuse is simultaneously about the body, the mind, the conscience and the institution.

The body is subjected to alleged sexual exploitation.

The mind is subjected to psychological manipulation.

The conscience is subjected to religious reinterpretation.

The institution may then control the response.

The resulting phenomenon cannot adequately be described by the single phrase **"sexual abuse."**

It is:

SEXUAL

because the alleged conduct involves sexual exploitation or sexual acts.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

because manipulation, dependency, intimidation and control can shape the victim's ability to resist and interpret what is happening.

SPIRITUAL

because religious authority, conscience, confession, vows or claims of divine significance can become part of the mechanism.

INSTITUTIONAL

because the religious organization determines access, hierarchy, discipline, reporting and often the response to allegations.

This four-part structure is the clearest formulation of what the adult-abuse material has added to our investigation.

SEXUAL ABUSE

-

PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIPULATION

-

SPIRITUAL COERCION

-

INSTITUTIONAL DEPENDENCY

=

THE BROADER PHENOMENON OF RELIGIOUS SEXUAL ABUSE

The central finding is therefore not that religion itself produces sexual abuse. The material does not establish that proposition. The finding is more precise: **where a religious institution creates relationships of exceptional spiritual authority and dependency, those relationships can be exploited sexually, psychologically and institutionally, and the resulting abuse cannot be understood fully without examining the religious power surrounding the sexual conduct.**

That is why adult women religious belong at the center of this history.

That is why Sant'Ambrogio matters.

That is why Rupnik matters.

That is why L'Arche matters.

And that is why the modern concept of **spiritual abuse** represents more than a new label.

It gives a name to a mechanism that the cases in our material have repeatedly exposed:

the transformation of spiritual trust into personal control, and of personal control into sexual exploitation.

Marko Rupnik

The case of **Marko Rupnik** brings the history of sexual and spiritual abuse of religious women into the contemporary Catholic Church. Unlike the familiar model of a priest abusing children, the allegations surrounding Rupnik primarily concern **adult women, many of them former nuns**, and describe an alleged combination of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse. More than twenty women have accused him, making the case one of the most

important modern examples in our material of how religious authority can become intertwined with alleged sexual exploitation of adults.

Rupnik's importance begins with the identity of the people who have come forward. They were not primarily children encountering an unknown priest in a parish. Many were **women religious or women connected to religious communities**, people whose lives were structured by Catholic spirituality and whose relationship with Rupnik could involve spiritual guidance, artistic formation, religious community and personal dependence. This makes the case directly relevant to the broader category established in the preceding pages: **religious woman → spiritual authority → dependency → alleged sexual exploitation**.

The allegations are therefore broader than sexual misconduct considered in isolation. The material describes accusations of **sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse**, including claims that religious authority was used to coerce sexual conduct. The alleged mechanism can be summarized as:

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCY
↓
MANIPULATION OF CONSCIENCE
↓
RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATION
↓
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

This structure is what makes Rupnik a modern parallel to the Sant'Ambrogio case. Sant'Ambrogio involved a closed female religious environment in which spiritual authority, confession, obedience, supernatural claims and alleged sexual manipulation became intertwined. Rupnik brings the same fundamental question into the modern period: **what happens when a person possessing exceptional spiritual authority becomes the object of intense trust and then allegedly uses that authority in a sexualized relationship with dependent women?**

One of the testimonies preserved in the material concerns **Gloria**, who encountered Rupnik in **1985**, when she was twenty-one years old. She was a medical student considering missionary work and seeking growth in her faith, and Rupnik became her spiritual guide. The material describes this relationship as giving him immediate access to her insecurities, fears and vulnerabilities, while his reputation as an exceptionally charismatic spiritual figure strengthened the authority he exercised over her.

The importance of this beginning cannot be overstated. Gloria did not initially approach Rupnik because she was seeking a sexual relationship. She approached him because she was seeking **spiritual guidance**. The alleged abuse therefore emerged, according to her account, from a relationship that had originally been established within a legitimate religious context.

The material describes Gloria becoming increasingly involved in Rupnik's artistic environment at the **Collegio Internazionale del Gesù in Rome**. She felt welcomed, understood and important in her desire to follow her religious vocation. She admired his art and spoke with him while he worked. Gradually, according to her testimony, he began to intensify their personal contact.

The progression described in the testimony is therefore:

SPIRITUAL SEEKING

↓

SPIRITUAL GUIDE

↓

TRUST

↓

ACCESS TO PERSONAL VULNERABILITIES

↓

INCREASING PERSONAL DEPENDENCY

↓

SEXUALIZATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP

This progression is central to the book's understanding of spiritual abuse.

The allegation is not simply that a priest made sexual advances toward an adult woman. It is that **the priest's religious position formed part of the mechanism through which the relationship developed and through which the alleged sexual exploitation became possible**.

The material contains similar testimony from **Samuelle**, another religious woman. Her first encounter with Rupnik occurred in an environment in which she had studied his theology and prepared questions because she wanted him to understand how seriously she wished to remain and continue studying mosaic art. According to her testimony, however, Rupnik's interest was directed elsewhere: their encounters became increasingly physical, with embraces that grew more intimate. When she attempted to withdraw, she says that he reproached her and characterized the embrace as something beautiful and "pure."

The significance of the word **"pure"** is precisely the intersection between spirituality and sexuality that defines this case.

According to Samuelle's account, the physical behavior was not presented simply as sexual misconduct. It was given a different meaning by the person exercising spiritual authority. The religious language could therefore function as a way of redefining the woman's own experience.

She experienced fear and wanted distance.

The authority figure allegedly described the contact as pure.

She experienced the encounter as unwanted.

The religious interpretation allegedly attempted to give the encounter another meaning.

This is the mechanism that the material identifies as **spiritual manipulation**.

The same testimony describes the circumstances surrounding the meetings. They occurred late at night, and Samuelle says that Rupnik instructed her to avoid being seen because of possible gossip. She describes feeling increasingly unable to react, afraid and psychologically overwhelmed.

The alleged mechanism therefore included **secrecy** as well as spiritual authority:

AUTHORITY

↓

PRIVATE ACCESS

↓

UNWANTED CONTACT

↓

RELIGIOUS REFRAMING

↓

SECRECY

↓

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUBMISSION

This is why the Rupnik case belongs simultaneously to the sexual-abuse and spiritual-abuse categories.

The material also describes alleged misconduct occurring beyond the private studio or office. Samuelle testified that Rupnik allegedly took advantage of moments when they were alone on artistic worksites, including inside a

church chapel, behind a column and on scaffolding. According to her account, being alone with him made her feel endangered and she therefore tried to remain around other people whenever possible.

Again, the significance is institutional.

The artistic environment created opportunities for private contact.

The religious environment created spiritual authority.

The community created dependency.

And the combination allegedly gave Rupnik access to women who regarded him as a teacher, artist, priest or spiritual guide.

This is why Rupnik's role cannot be reduced to a single institutional title. In the material he appears simultaneously as **priest, spiritual guide, artist and central figure of the Centro Aletti environment**. These different forms of authority could reinforce one another.

The spiritual authority gave him access.

The artistic authority gave him professional influence.

The institutional environment gave him a community and network.

His reputation gave him prestige.

The combination is what made the allegations particularly significant.

The material also describes the **Community Loyola** in Ljubljana, founded in the early 1980s by Rupnik and Ivanka Hosta, as another important part of his institutional history. According to the testimony presented in *Stupri Sacri*, Rupnik played a central role in identifying and selecting vocations and effectively managed aspects of the founding charism. His relationship with Ivanka Hosta dated back to when she was sixteen, and the material describes his influence over the community and over the young women associated with it.

This broadens the case beyond individual encounters.

Rupnik was not simply a priest who happened to meet women privately.

He was embedded in **religious communities, spiritual formation and artistic institutions**.

That creates a wider institutional environment:

RELIGIOUS WOMEN

↓

COMMUNITY / FORMATION

↓

RUPNIK

↓

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

↓

ARTISTIC / RELIGIOUS DEPENDENCY

↓

ALLEGED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

↓

JESUIT ORDER

↓

VATICAN

The material identifies this as the basic Rupnik network.

The alleged abuse therefore needs to be understood within a network rather than solely as a series of private encounters.

This does not mean that everyone connected to Centro Aletti, the Jesuits or the religious communities was involved in abuse. Our material specifically distinguishes between perpetrators, people accused of institutional failure and people who merely have institutional connections. That distinction must remain intact in the Rupnik case just as it does elsewhere in the book.

The same evidentiary rule applies to the women who have accused Rupnik. Their allegations are serious and numerous, but allegations must be distinguished from a final judicial finding. The material classifies Rupnik as a major case involving **serious allegations and institutional proceedings**, while noting that his canonical guilt had not been finally determined as of July 2026.

That point is particularly important because the case is still institutionally open.

The Jesuits expelled Rupnik in **2023**, after finding the allegations highly credible. The Vatican subsequently appointed a **five-member judicial panel** to conduct a canonical trial. The panel has been examining documentation from dioceses, the Jesuits, people involved and media reports.

The case therefore passed through several stages:

ALLEGATIONS

↓

TESTIMONY

↓

JESUIT INVESTIGATION / DISCIPLINE

↓

EXPULSION FROM THE ORDER

↓

VATICAN CANONICAL PROCESS

↓

FIVE-MEMBER JUDICIAL PANEL

↓

2026 — PROCEEDINGS STILL UNDER REVIEW

This chronology is important because it demonstrates that the case did not end with the initial institutional response.

The Jesuit expulsion represented one form of disciplinary action.

The Vatican canonical proceeding represents another.

The two should not be confused with a civil criminal prosecution.

The material specifically states that the Vatican's canonical proceeding can determine guilt under **canon law**, while civil criminal liability remains governed by the law of the country where the alleged acts occurred.

This distinction becomes especially important because the case has generated controversy over secrecy and access to information.

As of **22 July 2026**, the Vatican stated that no final decision had been reached and rejected reports that Rupnik had already been acquitted. The tribunal was still assessing the evidence.

Thus, the present status must be stated precisely:

RUPNIK — ALLEGATIONS + INSTITUTIONAL FINDINGS + CANONICAL PROCEEDINGS, BUT NO FINAL CANONICAL DECISION AS OF JULY 2026.

That is the factual position contained in our material.

The secrecy surrounding the proceeding is itself part of the institutional story. Lawyers representing victims criticized the secrecy surrounding the process, while the Vatican defended confidentiality. This creates a direct tension

between **victims' demand for information** and **the Church's canonical confidentiality**.

The issue is not merely procedural.

For victims, institutional secrecy can mean that they do not know what happened to their complaint, what evidence was considered, what conclusions investigators reached or when a final decision will come.

For the institution, confidentiality can be presented as a necessary element of a judicial process.

The conflict between these positions is one of the defining characteristics of the modern Rupnik case.

It also makes Rupnik an unusually useful test of whether the Catholic institutional system has changed.

The material asks two opposing questions:

Has the Vatican actually changed the institutional mechanisms that previously protected powerful clerics?

Or:

Has the secrecy mechanism simply evolved?

The case therefore provides a modern test of the historical pattern established earlier.

Sant'Ambrogio showed:

closed religious environment → spiritual authority → alleged sexual manipulation → ecclesiastical investigation.

Rupnik shows:

modern religious environment → spiritual authority → adult women / former nuns → allegations of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse → Jesuit discipline → Vatican canonical proceedings.

The institutional language is different.

The legal framework is different.

The century is different.

But the underlying question is strikingly similar:

Can a person who possesses extraordinary spiritual authority exploit the dependency created by that authority, and can the institution recognize and address that exploitation effectively?

The material also places Rupnik within the broader evolution of Vatican law.

The 2023 revision of *Vos estis lux mundi* explicitly encompasses **sexual acts involving abuse of authority and vulnerable adults**, alongside clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life and certain international Catholic associations. It also addresses pornography involving minors or certain vulnerable persons and interference with investigations.

This means that adult religious women are no longer outside the conceptual boundaries of the modern safeguarding system.

They belong directly inside it.

That is one of the most important developments demonstrated by the Rupnik case.

The old public model was:

PRIEST → CHILD

The broader model is now:

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY → VULNERABLE PERSON

And vulnerable can mean:

child

seminarian

nun

adult woman

religious follower

other dependent person.

The Rupnik allegations therefore help demonstrate why the definition of abuse has expanded.

The material identifies **sexual abuse, grooming, sexual exploitation, sexual coercion, spiritual abuse, abuse of authority, sexualized religious manipulation, cover-up, retaliation and institutional transfer** as distinct categories that may need to be examined separately.

Rupnik belongs particularly strongly to the intersection of:

sexual exploitation

spiritual abuse

psychological manipulation

abuse of authority

institutional dependency.

The testimony of Gloria illustrates this intersection through the alleged progression from spiritual guidance to sexual exploitation. The testimony of Samuelle illustrates it through alleged unwanted physical contact, secrecy and the religious reframing of her resistance. These accounts are allegations and testimonies, not a final judicial finding, but they demonstrate why the case is treated in our material as a central example of spiritual abuse.

The material also identifies an important legal and disciplinary event in Rupnik's history: in **2020**, he was excommunicated after a complaint concerning the canonical offence of **absolution of an accomplice in confession**—absolving in confession a woman with whom he had had a sexual relationship. The excommunication was subsequently lifted that same month, and an ecclesiastical investigation was later closed in **October 2022** on the ground that the relevant facts were prescribed under the applicable limitation rules.

This chronology adds another layer to the case:

2019 complaint

↓

2020 excommunication

↓

2020 lifting of excommunication

↓

2021 Gloria's detailed testimony

↓

2022 ecclesiastical investigation closed as prescribed

↓

2022 Gloria's open letter

↓

2023 Jesuit expulsion

↓

Vatican canonical proceedings

↓

2026 — no final decision

The sequence is important because it demonstrates that the Rupnik case cannot be reduced to the moment when the allegations became publicly known.

Institutional action occurred at multiple stages.

So did institutional controversy.

The material records that Gloria testified in detail in **December 2021** and later wrote an open letter in June 2022 because she had not received information for months about the outcome of the ecclesiastical investigation. Her letter described what she characterized as a **circle of silence and exclusion** following her original complaint.

This makes the victim's experience part of the institutional chronology rather than a footnote to it.

The question becomes:

What happened after the victim spoke?

Not simply:

What happened during the alleged abuse?

That distinction is fundamental to the book's wider argument.

The institutional response can itself become a second stage of the victim's experience.

First comes the alleged abuse.

Then comes disclosure.

Then comes investigation.

Then comes the question of whether the institution believes the victim.

Then comes discipline.

Then comes information about the outcome.

If the process is prolonged or secret, the victim may experience another period of uncertainty and institutional dependence.

The Rupnik case makes this visible.

It also demonstrates that **spiritual abuse can have consequences extending beyond the sexual acts themselves**. The material describes women who reported psychological distress and long-term effects from their experiences. Samuelle, for example, described feeling emptied out, unable to react and treated as an object, while Gloria described the lasting consequences of the relationship and the impact on her life and religious vocation.

The damage described in these testimonies is therefore simultaneously:

sexual

because sexual conduct is alleged;

psychological

because the women describe fear, manipulation, dependency and emotional consequences;

spiritual

because the alleged conduct occurred within relationships involving faith, vocation and spiritual guidance;

institutional

because the relationships existed inside or around Catholic communities and the allegations subsequently entered Church disciplinary structures.

That fourfold character is what makes Rupnik one of the most important cases in this book.

The case also demonstrates why **spiritual abuse** deserves independent recognition.

In 2024, the material records that Pope Francis instructed the Vatican to study whether spiritual abuse should become a distinct canonical crime. The proposal concerned situations in which supposed mystical or spiritual experiences are used to exert control over people.

This is extraordinarily relevant to Rupnik because the alleged mechanism is precisely the intersection of spirituality and control:

spiritual authority

↓

manipulation

↓

conscience

↓

religious justification

↓

sexual exploitation.

The development of this concept represents an institutional recognition that sexual exploitation inside religious relationships may not be understandable solely through ordinary categories of sexual misconduct.

The religious context can itself be part of the alleged abuse.

That is the deeper significance of Rupnik.

He represents the modern version of a problem already visible in Sant'Ambrogio: **the exploitation of religious dependency through a combination of spiritual authority and sexuality**.

But the modern case also shows something that the nineteenth-century case could not show: the contemporary Church now possesses a much more developed canonical framework for handling abuse allegations, including mechanisms addressing vulnerable adults and abuse of authority.

The question is therefore no longer only whether such abuse exists.

The question is whether the modern institutional machinery is capable of dealing with it transparently and effectively.

Rupnik remains unresolved as of July 2026.

That unresolved status is itself historically important.

The case has already produced:

multiple allegations

more than twenty women

predominantly former nuns

sexual-abuse allegations

psychological-abuse allegations

spiritual-abuse allegations

Jesuit disciplinary action

a Vatican canonical process

a five-member tribunal

victims' criticism of secrecy

and continuing institutional uncertainty.

The case therefore stands at the intersection of the historical and contemporary parts of this book.

Sant'Ambrogio showed the older architecture.

Rupnik shows its modern counterpart.

The difference is that the modern Church now explicitly possesses concepts such as **abuse of authority, vulnerable adults and spiritual abuse**, and

has created formal procedures through which such allegations can enter the canonical system.

Whether those mechanisms ultimately produce justice in the Rupnik case remains unresolved.

But the case has already established one important conclusion for this book:

Catholic sexual abuse cannot be understood exclusively as the abuse of children by priests.

The evidence in our material shows another category in which **adult women, particularly women religious, can become vulnerable through spiritual dependency and religious authority**.

And Rupnik is the central modern case through which that category becomes visible.

He therefore connects the closed convent of Sant'Ambrogio with the modern Catholic Church:

SANT'AMBROGIO

closed religious community
→ spiritual authority
→ obedience
→ alleged sexual manipulation
→ ecclesiastical investigation

↓

RUPNIK

adult women / former nuns
→ spiritual authority
→ psychological dependency
→ alleged sexual exploitation
→ Jesuit discipline
→ Vatican canonical process

The institutions are separated by more than a century.

The people are different.

The legal systems are different.

But the underlying problem is remarkably recognizable:

when spiritual authority becomes personal power, and personal power is allegedly converted into sexual control, abuse can become simultaneously sexual, psychological, spiritual and institutional.

That is why Marko Rupnik belongs at the center of this history.

The Rupnik Institutional Question

The Marko Rupnik case becomes especially important when the focus moves from the allegations themselves to the **institutions that received, assessed and acted upon them**. More than twenty women, predominantly former religious sisters, accused Rupnik of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse, including allegations that religious authority was used to coerce sexual conduct. The subsequent path—from the women who came forward, through the Jesuits, and ultimately into the Vatican's canonical system—allows us to examine whether the Church's modern machinery operates differently from the older mechanisms of delay, secrecy and institutional protection identified elsewhere in this book.

The institutional chain is unusually clear:

WOMEN / FORMER RELIGIOUS SISTERS
↓
ALLEGATIONS
↓
JESUIT ORDER
↓
CHURCH DISCIPLINE
↓
VATICAN
↓
CANONICAL TRIAL
↓
FIVE-MEMBER TRIBUNAL
↓
2026 — PROCESS STILL UNDER REVIEW

This sequence matters because the Rupnik case did not remain entirely inside the old pattern of allegations disappearing into an institution. There was an eventual Jesuit investigation, an institutional finding concerning the credibility of the allegations, Rupnik's expulsion from the order, and later a Vatican canonical process. At the same time, the chronology contains serious controversy concerning delay, prescription, secrecy and the treatment of the women who had complained. The result is therefore not a simple story of either institutional protection or institutional reform.

The first decisive institutional fact is the **credibility assessment by the Jesuits**. According to the material, the Jesuits conducted an internal investigation and in 2023 expelled Rupnik after finding the allegations **highly**

credible. This is an important distinction from a final judicial determination: the Jesuit assessment established a serious institutional judgment concerning the allegations, but it was not itself equivalent to a final canonical conviction.

That distinction has to remain throughout the case.

ALLEGATION

is not automatically

PROVEN CRIME.

Likewise:

INTERNAL CREDIBILITY FINDING

is not automatically

FINAL CANONICAL CONVICTION.

And:

EXPULSION FROM A RELIGIOUS ORDER

is not identical to

CRIMINAL CONVICTION BY A STATE COURT.

The institutional history becomes clearer when each stage is kept separate.

The allegations emerged publicly in **2021**, with Gloria Branciani among the principal women bringing them forward. The material describes allegations involving manipulation, the use of confession to justify sexual acts, and a wider structure of psychological and spiritual control. It also records that several women had remained silent for many years before finding the strength to speak.

The delay in disclosure is itself relevant to the institutional question. Where alleged abuse takes place within a relationship of spiritual dependency, victims may not immediately understand what has happened in the same way that an outside observer would. The material describes a system in which religious devotion, spiritual authority and psychological manipulation became intertwined, producing consequences that could persist for years.

The first major institutional problem arose when the allegations entered the canonical system.

According to the material, the **Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith initially refused to open a formal canonical investigation**, citing the applicable limitation period because the alleged acts had occurred many years earlier and involved adults. This is one of the most controversial parts of the chronology because it meant that the existence of serious allegations did not initially lead to a full canonical prosecution.

The result was:

ALLEGATIONS

↓

VATICAN AWARENESS

↓

LIMITATION / PRESCRIPTION ISSUE

↓

NO INITIAL FORMAL CANONICAL PROSECUTION

That is precisely the kind of institutional mechanism this book has already identified as capable of preventing allegations from reaching substantive adjudication.

But the Rupnik case did not end there.

The women who had complained protested the decision. Gloria's letter and the growing public controversy put renewed pressure on the Church. In **2023, Pope Francis ordered the case reopened, revoked the limitation barrier and entrusted the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith with a new investigation**.

This was therefore a significant departure from the initial position.

The first decision was effectively:

prescription → no formal prosecution.

The later decision became:

papal intervention → prescription removed → renewed canonical process.

This is one of the strongest reasons Rupnik is so important as a test of institutional change.

The Church did not simply maintain the original refusal.

It eventually changed course.

But the fact that the course had to be changed is equally important.

The case therefore contains both **institutional failure and institutional correction**.

That is a much more complicated—and more revealing—picture than simply saying that the Church either protected Rupnik or acted against him.

The Jesuit response forms another part of the chronology. After the allegations accumulated, the Society of Jesus conducted an internal investigation and in **June 2023** expelled Rupnik from the order. The formal reason given was **"disobedience,"** according to the material. The women representing the victims and the author of *Stupri Sacri* criticized the formulation as failing to reflect the seriousness of the underlying abuse allegations.

This creates an important distinction between **substantive action** and **formal explanation**.

The substantive action was significant:

RUPNIK WAS EXPELLED FROM THE JESUIT ORDER.

But the formal canonical reason cited was disobedience rather than a final determination that he had committed the alleged sexual abuse.

The two facts must therefore be recorded separately.

This is precisely the type of distinction that allows the book to present the institutional history accurately rather than simply treating every disciplinary act as proof of criminal guilt.

The material also records that Rupnik's situation did not end with his expulsion from the Jesuits. His **incardination in the Diocese of Koper in Slovenia** generated further controversy because he remained a priest outside the Jesuit order. The institutional problem therefore changed form rather than simply disappearing.

The sequence becomes:

JESUIT ORDER

↓

INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

↓

EXPULSION

↓

INCARDINATION ELSEWHERE

↓

CONTINUING QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

This is particularly relevant to the broader institutional pattern identified earlier in the book. One of the recurring problems in Catholic abuse cases is **inter-institutional mobility**: responsibility can become fragmented when a person moves between religious orders, dioceses or countries. The Rupnik

case provides a modern example in which removal from one institutional structure did not automatically mean removal from the priesthood itself.

The Vatican subsequently established a more formal judicial process.

The material records that **Pope Francis lifted the statute-of-limitations barrier in 2023**, allowing the canonical process to proceed. In **October 2025**, five judges outside the Curial bureaucracy were appointed to conduct the trial. By 2026, the tribunal was examining documentation from the dioceses involved, the Jesuits, people connected with the case and media reports.

This is institutionally significant.

The case was no longer simply being handled by the religious order with which Rupnik had been associated.

It had entered a formal Vatican judicial process.

The tribunal's composition also matters because the five judges were described in our material as being **outside the Curial bureaucracy**. This can be viewed as an attempt to create greater procedural independence within the canonical system. Whether it ultimately produces a more independent form of justice is something the unresolved case does not yet allow us to determine.

The current structure is therefore:

VICTIMS

↓

JESUIT INVESTIGATION

↓

JESUIT DISCIPLINE

↓

POPE LIFTS PRESCRIPTION BARRIER

↓

VATICAN CANONICAL TRIAL

↓

FIVE JUDGES

↓

EVIDENCE FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES

↓

NO FINAL DECISION AS OF JULY 2026

The final point is essential.

As of **July 2026**, the Vatican specifically denied reports that Rupnik had already been acquitted. The Holy See stated that the assessment remained underway and that the tribunal was still examining documentation from dioceses, the Jesuits, people involved and media sources.

Therefore the book cannot truthfully describe Rupnik as either canonically convicted or canonically acquitted.

The correct conclusion is:

The allegations are serious and numerous; the Jesuits found them highly credible and expelled Rupnik; the Vatican subsequently reopened and formalized the canonical process; and as of July 2026 the canonical tribunal had not reached a final decision.

This distinction is central to the institutional analysis.

The question is not simply whether the Church eventually did something.

It did.

The more important question is **when** it acted, **why** it acted, and **what happened before the decisive action**.

That chronology reveals both change and continuity.

The old mechanism

ALLEGATION

↓

INTERNAL HANDLING

↓

PRESCRIPTION / PROCEDURAL BARRIER

↓

DELAY

↓

INSTITUTIONAL SILENCE

The newer mechanism

ALLEGATION

↓

CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENT

↓

INTERNAL DISCIPLINE

↓

PAPAL INTERVENTION

↓

PRESCRIPTION REMOVED

↓

FORMAL CANONICAL TRIAL

↓

INDEPENDENT-LEANING PANEL

The modern system therefore appears to contain stronger mechanisms for escalation than the older one.

But the material also demonstrates that **secrecy has not disappeared**.

This is the central institutional question.

Lawyers representing victims criticized the secrecy surrounding the canonical proceedings, while the Vatican defended confidentiality. The tribunal was therefore operating within a modernized judicial structure while still maintaining a significant degree of procedural confidentiality.

This creates the central tension:

TRANSPARENCY FOR VICTIMS

versus

CONFIDENTIALITY OF CANONICAL PROCEEDINGS

The conflict is not merely theoretical.

For the institution, confidentiality may be regarded as part of the canonical judicial process.

For victims, secrecy can mean uncertainty about what evidence has been examined, what conclusions have been reached and when a final decision will occur.

The material therefore asks the crucial question:

Has the Vatican actually changed the institutional mechanisms that previously protected powerful clerics—or has the secrecy mechanism simply evolved?

Rupnik is uniquely suited to answer this question because the case is happening **now**, rather than being reconstructed decades later.

With Maciel, we look backward at a long period of institutional protection followed by Vatican action.

With McCarrick, we reconstruct what bishops, cardinals and Vatican officials knew and how his advancement continued.

With Sant'Ambrogio, we examine the older structure of a closed religious community and an ecclesiastical investigation.

With Rupnik, we can observe a modern Church attempting to process allegations involving adult religious women under contemporary canonical rules.

The comparison is therefore direct:

Case	Central institutional problem	Eventual response
Maciel	Long period of allegations, protection and institutional usefulness	Vatican investigation and canonical restrictions
McCarrick	Allegations and warnings alongside continued advancement	Eventual removal and Vatican investigation
Sant'Ambrogio	Closed religious community, spiritual authority and alleged sexual manipulation	Ecclesiastical / inquisitorial investigation
Rupnik	Adult women, spiritual abuse, credibility findings, secrecy and procedural conflict	Jesuit expulsion + ongoing Vatican trial

The pattern is therefore neither "nothing changed" nor "everything changed."

Something clearly changed.

The Church now has a formal safeguarding and canonical framework that explicitly recognizes **abuse of authority and vulnerable adults**. The material records that the 2023 revision of *Vos estis lux mundi* expanded the framework beyond abuse of minors to include sexual acts involving abuse of authority and vulnerable adults, as well as members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life.

That development is directly relevant to Rupnik.

The victims are predominantly adult women.

Many are former nuns.

The alleged mechanism includes spiritual authority and psychological dependency.

Therefore the case falls within precisely the broader category that the modern Church has begun to recognize.

This is an important institutional development because the historical system was heavily centered upon **children abused by priests**. Rupnik demonstrates that modern safeguarding must also confront **adult religious women subjected to abuse of authority**.

The material records another significant development in **2024**, when Pope Francis instructed the Vatican to study whether **"spiritual abuse" should become a distinct canonical crime**. The initiative concerned situations in which supposed mystical or spiritual experiences are used to exert control over people.

This is directly connected to the Rupnik allegations.

The alleged mechanism was not simply:

priest → sexual act → victim.

It was:

spiritual authority

↓

manipulation

↓

conscience

↓

religious justification

↓

sexual exploitation.

That distinction matters because it demonstrates that the Church's legal categories themselves are changing in response to cases of this kind.

The question is whether institutional practice has changed as much as institutional vocabulary.

Rupnik provides both evidence for change and evidence of continuing problems.

Evidence of change

The allegations were formally assessed.

The Jesuits found them highly credible.

Rupnik was expelled from the order.

The Pope removed the limitation barrier.

A formal Vatican tribunal was established.

Five judges outside the Curial bureaucracy were appointed.

The case remained under active judicial review in 2026.

Evidence of continuing problems

The initial canonical process was blocked by prescription.

The women had to protest before the case was reopened.

The Jesuit expulsion used "disobedience" as its formal ground.

Rupnik remained a priest after leaving the Jesuits.

The canonical proceedings remain confidential.

Victims' lawyers have criticized the secrecy.

And no final canonical judgment had been reached as of July 2026.

This is why the Rupnik case cannot be used honestly to prove either complete institutional reform or complete institutional continuity.

The evidence supports a **mixed conclusion**.

The machinery is more developed.

The categories are broader.

The possibility of intervention is greater.

But the institutional culture of confidentiality and the potential for procedural delay remain.

This mixed result is one of the most important findings of the entire investigation.

The Vatican is not a single behavioral actor.

Different periods and different officials have produced different outcomes.

The material itself emphasizes this point by comparing the major cases:

Maciel: long period of protection or inaction, followed by Vatican sanction.

McCarrick: multiple levels of knowledge, delayed decisive action, eventual removal.

Sodalitium: investigation followed by expulsion of the founder and dissolution of the organization.

Rupnik: allegations, complex institutional handling and continuing canonical proceedings in 2026.

This means that the real institutional question is more sophisticated than **"Does the Vatican cover up abuse?"**

The stronger question is:

What conditions cause the Vatican system to protect, ignore, delay, investigate, punish or dismantle an abusive institution?

Rupnik is particularly valuable because the case contains several of these stages at once.

There was delay.

There was institutional assessment.

There was disciplinary action.

There was papal intervention.

There was judicial escalation.

There was continuing secrecy.

The system therefore demonstrates both its **capacity for correction** and its **capacity for delay**.

The case also provides an important test of whether powerful clerics remain insulated by institutional usefulness. Rupnik was not simply a parish priest. His artistic reputation was enormous, and the material describes an extensive commercial and artistic system surrounding his work. His art appeared in churches and religious institutions, and his influence extended through Centro Aletti and related structures.

That makes his case structurally comparable to Maciel in one limited respect: both men possessed forms of institutional usefulness that extended beyond their personal religious status.

Maciel possessed fundraising power and a vast religious organization.

Rupnik possessed artistic prestige and a major artistic-religious network.

But the evidence does not establish that Rupnik's artistic importance caused the institutional decisions concerning him. That would be an inference rather than an established fact. The appropriate conclusion is that **he possessed substantial institutional prestige at the time the allegations emerged**, making the Church's handling of the case particularly significant.

This is another reason the institutional question must be separated from the allegation question.

The allegation concerns what Rupnik allegedly did.

The institutional question concerns what others knew and how they responded.

The procedural question concerns how the Church's legal system handled the allegations.

The reputational question concerns the value of Rupnik's position to Catholic institutions.

These are connected, but they are not identical.

The material also identifies **Laura Sgrò**, the lawyer representing women in the case and author of *Stupri Sacri*, as an important participant in this history. Her position gives the investigation access to the victim-side perspective and makes the case especially relevant to the broader study of abuse of women religious.

The women's testimony is therefore not peripheral evidence.

It is the starting point of the entire institutional process.

Without complaints, there is no investigation.

Without investigation, there is no credibility assessment.

Without credibility assessment, there is no disciplinary decision.

Without institutional pressure, the prescription barrier might have remained in place.

And without the Pope's intervention, the canonical trial would not have proceeded in its present form.

The institutional chain therefore begins with the victims.

That is itself an important contrast with older models in which institutional authorities could control the entire flow of information.

The Rupnik case demonstrates a modern feedback loop:

VICTIMS

↓

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

↓

MEDIA / LAWYERS

↓

INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURE

↓

JESUIT ACTION

↓

PAPAL INTERVENTION

↓

VATICAN JUDICIAL PROCESS

This does not mean that media pressure is inherently necessary for justice, nor does the material establish that every institutional decision occurred solely because of public pressure. But it does show that the case became increasingly difficult to contain as the allegations became public and the women continued to demand action.

The material itself describes the Church's response as moving **extremely slowly and only after media pressure**, while also acknowledging that the Jesuits eventually took disciplinary action.

That is precisely the mixed institutional picture.

The Church acted.

But it acted after delay.

The Church assessed credibility.

But the canonical process initially stalled.

The Jesuits expelled Rupnik.

But the formal reason was disobedience.

The Pope reopened the case.

But the proceedings remained confidential.

The Vatican established a tribunal.

But the final judgment remained unresolved.

This is not a simple story of institutional success.

It is also not a simple story of institutional protection.

It is a story of **institutional evolution under pressure**.

And that is why Rupnik should be treated as the modern test case.

The historical cases showed systems in which religious authority, secrecy and institutional reputation could protect powerful figures for years.

The modern Rupnik case shows a Church that has created new mechanisms for safeguarding, expanded the definition of abuse, created formal procedures

for vulnerable adults and spiritual abuse, and demonstrated that even a powerful cleric can eventually be subjected to institutional discipline.

But it also shows that **confidentiality, prescription, institutional fragmentation and procedural delay have not disappeared**.

The old machinery has therefore not simply vanished.

Parts of it have been dismantled.

Parts have been strengthened.

Parts have been renamed.

And parts remain.

That is the conclusion the evidence presently permits.

The most important comparison is therefore:

OLD SYSTEM

authority → secrecy → institutional protection → delay → eventual action

versus

MODERN SYSTEM

allegation → credibility assessment → institutional discipline → procedural review → Vatican trial → continuing confidentiality

The second system is plainly more elaborate.

Whether it is fundamentally more effective remains unresolved.

As of July 2026, the Rupnik tribunal had not reached its final decision. The Vatican explicitly rejected reports that Rupnik had already been acquitted and stated that the evidence was still being examined.

That unresolved ending is precisely what makes the case historically valuable.

The book does not need to predict the verdict.

It does not need to decide in advance whether the tribunal will convict or acquit.

The institutional facts already tell us something important.

The Church received serious allegations from more than twenty women.

The Jesuits found those allegations highly credible.

Rupnik was expelled from the order.

The initial canonical process was blocked by prescription.

The Pope subsequently removed that barrier.

A formal Vatican tribunal was established.

The proceedings continued into 2026.

Victims' lawyers criticized the secrecy.

The Vatican defended the confidentiality of the process.

And no final canonical judgment had yet been reached.

These facts provide the answer to the institutional question without forcing a premature conclusion.

The modern Church's machinery has changed—but the evidence does not show that the old problems of secrecy, delay and institutional conflict have disappeared.

Rupnik therefore represents neither proof of total reform nor proof that nothing has changed.

He represents something more revealing:

a modernized institutional system struggling with an old problem.

The Church now has more formal mechanisms to investigate abuse.

It has broader definitions of vulnerability.

It recognizes abuse of authority.

It is considering spiritual abuse as a distinct canonical offence.

It can lift limitation barriers.

It can appoint external judges.

It can expel powerful religious figures.

But the process can still be slow.

It can still be secret.

It can still leave victims waiting.

And it can still produce uncertainty over the relationship between institutional discipline and final judicial responsibility.

That is the real significance of the Rupnik case.

It does not merely ask whether one priest abused women.

It asks whether the **institution that once had the power to protect powerful clerics has developed enough independent machinery to hold them accountable when the victims are adults, the allegations concern spiritual manipulation, the accused possesses enormous prestige, and**

the alleged conduct occurred years before the complaint became public.

As of 2026, the answer is not yet complete.

But the evidence already shows that the old system has been challenged—and that the struggle between **accountability and institutional secrecy** is still taking place inside the modern Catholic Church.

The Modern Concept of Spiritual Abuse

The recognition of **spiritual abuse** represents one of the most significant developments in the material assembled for this investigation. The Church's traditional public understanding of sexual abuse was centered heavily on the relationship between a priest and a child, but the cases examined here reveal a broader problem: religious authority itself can become part of the mechanism through which sexual exploitation is carried out. The modern discussion of spiritual abuse therefore shifts attention from the age of the victim alone to the **power relationship between the religious authority and the person who depends upon that authority**.

The significance of this development became particularly clear in **2024**, when the Vatican began studying whether **"spiritual abuse" should become a distinct canonical crime**. According to the material, the initiative was prompted in part by cases such as Marko Rupnik, in which alleged sexual exploitation was intertwined with claims of spiritual manipulation and misuse of religious authority. The proposal specifically concerned situations in which supposed mystical or spiritual experiences are used to exert control over people.

This is a major conceptual change.

The problem is no longer defined simply as:

PRIEST → SEXUAL ACT → VICTIM

The broader mechanism can be:

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
↓

MANIPULATION
↓
CONSCIENCE
↓
RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATION
↓
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION.

The distinction matters because the sexual conduct may be only the final stage of a much longer process. The authority figure may first establish trust, become the person's spiritual guide, gain access to intimate information, influence the person's understanding of morality and obedience, and then allegedly use that position to obtain sexual access. In such circumstances, the religious relationship is not merely the background to the abuse; **it becomes part of the alleged mechanism of abuse itself**.

The material identifies several components of this broader system: **spiritual coercion, abuse of confession, manipulation of religious vows, sexual exploitation of nuns, abuse of seminarians, institutional intimidation, retaliation against complainants, financial dependency and manipulation of victims' understanding of sin and obedience**.

These mechanisms do not necessarily occur together in every case. They are the different ways in which religious authority can become connected with exploitation. The important conclusion is therefore structural rather than universal: **where a religious authority possesses exceptional influence over a dependent person, that authority can potentially be turned into a means of sexual, psychological or spiritual control**.

The first element is **trust**.

Spiritual authority depends upon trust. A person approaches a priest, confessor or spiritual director precisely because that person is believed to possess religious knowledge and to be capable of helping with questions of faith, conscience, vocation and personal morality. This can create a relationship considerably more intimate than an ordinary professional relationship.

The second element is **access**.

A spiritual adviser can receive information that other people do not possess. The material's discussion of confession identifies the historical mechanism particularly clearly: women increasingly used priests as confessors and spiritual advisers, sometimes discussing highly intimate matters concerning sexuality. Church authorities eventually introduced rules intended to prevent confessors from crossing sexual boundaries with female penitents, while

historical research identified cases of sexual misconduct by confessors toward female penitents.

The resulting structure is:

WOMAN

↓

CONFESSION / SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING

↓

PRIEST

↓

INTIMATE INFORMATION

↓

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

↓

POTENTIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION.

This historical structure is important because it shows that the concept of spiritual abuse did not emerge from nowhere in the modern period. The terminology may be contemporary, but the underlying problem—**the possibility that a person exercising spiritual authority could exploit the intimacy and dependency created by that authority**—appears much earlier in the material.

The Sant'Ambrogio case provides another historical example. Its importance lies in the combination of **sexual relationships, spiritual authority, confession, supernatural claims, institutional hierarchy and religious obedience inside a closed female community**. The material explicitly places Sant'Ambrogio and Rupnik in the same conceptual category without claiming that they were the same case or part of one continuous organization.

The historical-to-modern progression can therefore be expressed:

SANT'AMBROGIO

↓

abuse of nuns

↓

spiritual authority

↓

sexual manipulation

↓

RUPNIK

↓

spiritual abuse

The significance of this connection is not that every historical convent scandal proves modern sexual abuse. The material explicitly warns against such an interpretation. Instead, the historical cases demonstrate recurring **structures of religious dependency and authority**, while the modern cases provide more explicit terminology for understanding how those structures can be exploited.

This is why the concept of spiritual abuse is particularly important for **adult religious women**.

An adult woman may legally be an adult while still occupying a highly dependent religious position. A nun may depend upon her religious community, her superiors and her spiritual directors. A woman discerning a vocation may place exceptional trust in the priest guiding her. A member of a religious movement may depend upon a charismatic founder for spiritual direction and community life.

The material therefore states the central principle directly:

The key variable isn't the victim's age. It's dependency on religious authority.

This principle changes the scope of the investigation.

The system is not simply:

male priest → minor

It includes:

clergy → adult religious women

superior → subordinate nun

spiritual director → dependent person

religious founder → followers.

The modern Catholic framework reflects this broader understanding. The material notes that the **2023 revision of** *Vos estis lux mundi* explicitly covers sexual acts involving **abuse of authority and vulnerable adults**, alongside clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life and

certain other Catholic leadership positions. It also addresses interference with investigations.

This is important because it places adult religious women directly inside the modern institutional-abuse framework.

They are not an afterthought.

They are not merely an unusual variation of child abuse.

They represent a distinct category of vulnerability arising from **religious authority and dependency**.

The material's four-branch model makes this particularly clear:

A. Priest → nun
Sexual exploitation of women religious.

B. Superior → nun
Abuse inside religious orders.

C. Spiritual director → adult
Sexual exploitation through confession or spiritual counselling.

D. Religious founder → followers
Charismatic authority combined with sexual exploitation.

The concept of spiritual abuse therefore allows these apparently different cases to be understood together.

The **priest** possesses sacramental authority.

The **superior** possesses institutional authority.

The **spiritual director** possesses authority over conscience and religious guidance.

The **founder** possesses charismatic authority.

The source of authority differs, but the vulnerability can arise from the same fundamental relationship:

AUTHORITY → DEPENDENCY → CONTROL.

Sexual exploitation can then become one possible expression of that control.

The Rupnik case is the clearest modern example in our material. More than twenty women, predominantly former nuns, have accused him of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse. The allegations include claims that religious authority was used to coerce sexual conduct.

The significance of Rupnik is therefore not simply the number of accusations.

It is the **type of relationship described by the allegations**.

The material's formulation is:

clerical authority → spiritual dependency → psychological control → sexual exploitation.

This is fundamentally different from a random sexual assault committed by someone who happens to be a priest.

In the spiritual-abuse model, the religious role may provide the perpetrator with:

access

trust

credibility

psychological influence

knowledge of vulnerabilities

authority over conscience

institutional prestige

and potentially

control over the victim's religious environment.

The sexual exploitation is therefore connected to the person's position inside the religious system.

This is why the Vatican's consideration of spiritual abuse as a separate canonical crime matters so much. If the Church recognizes that spiritual authority can itself be abused, then the institutional definition of the problem has moved beyond the idea of the isolated sexual predator. It acknowledges that **the misuse of religious power can be a distinct form of wrongdoing**.

The concept also helps explain why some victims may struggle to identify their experiences as abuse.

If the person exercising authority tells the victim that a particular action is spiritually meaningful, necessary for religious growth, an expression of purity or part of a special mystical relationship, the victim is confronted with a conflict between her own experience and the authority's interpretation.

The material concerning Rupnik illustrates this alleged mechanism through testimony that sexualized conduct was given a religious interpretation. In the account of Samuelle, for example, behavior she experienced as frightening or unwanted was allegedly described to her as something "pure."

The importance of such testimony is not that every religious explanation of sexual conduct is automatically abusive. It is that **religious language can potentially be used to reinterpret an act for the person subjected to it**.

The structure becomes:

VICTIM'S EXPERIENCE

↓

"THIS IS WRONG / UNWANTED"

↓

AUTHORITY FIGURE'S RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION

↓

"YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS MEANS"

↓

CONFUSION / DEPENDENCY

↓

CONTINUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Where this is established by evidence, the spiritual dimension becomes integral to the abuse.

This is also why **religious vows** matter.

A vow of obedience is a religious commitment, not an invitation to sexual exploitation. But if an authority figure invokes obedience to demand conduct outside the legitimate scope of religious discipline, the vow can become a mechanism of control. The material specifically identifies manipulation of religious vows as part of the adult-abuse system.

The distinction is therefore:

RELIGIOUS VOW

→ legitimate religious commitment

versus

MISUSE OF RELIGIOUS VOW

→ personal control over a dependent person.

The same distinction applies to confession.

CONFESSION

is a religious practice.

But:

MISUSE OF CONFESSIONAL AUTHORITY

can become part of an abusive relationship.

The historical material makes this especially clear. Church authorities themselves eventually introduced rules intended to prevent confessors from crossing sexual boundaries with female penitents. This demonstrates that the problem was recognized as sufficiently serious to require institutional regulation.

Spiritual abuse therefore occupies a position between **religious practice and institutional misconduct**.

The practices themselves are not the abuse.

The alleged exploitation of those practices is.

This distinction is necessary because otherwise the analysis would become too broad to be useful.

The book cannot say:

confession = abuse.

It must say:

confessional authority can be exploited.

It cannot say:

religious vows = coercion.

It must say:

religious vows can be manipulated by an authority figure.

It cannot say:

spiritual direction = sexual abuse.

It must say:

spiritual direction can provide a relationship of dependency that may be exploited sexually.

This is the evidentiary standard that keeps the concept meaningful.

The material also shows that the problem extends beyond priests.

The **L'Arche** investigation found that founder Jean Vanier and priest Thomas Philippe had sexually and spiritually exploited women, with the abuse associated with mystical or spiritual manipulation and continuing amid secrecy. The material describes the resulting configuration as:

charismatic Christian founder

↓

spiritual authority

↓

adult women

↓

religious / mystical justification

↓

sexual exploitation

↓

secrecy

↓

institutional failure.

This is important because it demonstrates that spiritual abuse is not inherently a problem of the Catholic priesthood alone.

The broader Christian institutional model can include **charismatic founders and religious leaders** whose authority derives from their perceived spiritual status rather than simply from ordination.

That widens the conceptual category while preserving the central mechanism:

spiritual authority → dependency → exploitation.

The same principle also explains why the material includes **abusive nuns** within the broader investigation. The AP material summarized in our document describes survivors reporting abuse by sisters involving grooming, manipulation and sexual exploitation and notes that relatively few dioceses or religious orders publicly maintain lists of abusive nuns.

This demonstrates that spiritual abuse cannot be reduced to:

male authority → female victim.

Authority can also operate:

female superior → subordinate nun.

The relevant variable remains **institutional power**.

That is why the modern framework includes members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life rather than limiting the system to diocesan priests. The institutional population can include priests, bishops,

cardinals, monks, brothers, nuns, sisters, religious superiors, seminary personnel and lay personnel operating within Catholic institutions.

The spiritual-abuse concept therefore helps unify a broad institutional network without claiming that every person within it is abusive.

The question becomes:

Which relationships create exceptional dependency?

Which authorities possess control over the person's religious life?

Which mechanisms allow that authority to be exploited?

What happens when the dependent person challenges the authority?

Who receives the complaint?

Who controls the investigation?

These questions connect spiritual abuse directly to the larger institutional investigation.

The final question—**who controls the investigation**—is particularly important.

The material identifies information control as one of the most significant features of the modern Vatican system. It records that the Church's reforms have increasingly addressed not only sexual abuse but also **interference with investigations**, and that *Vos estis lux mundi* explicitly covers actions or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil or canonical investigations.

This is significant because the abuse system has two potentially separate stages:

THE ORIGINAL ABUSE

and

THE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE ABUSE.

The second stage can determine whether the first becomes publicly known, formally investigated and institutionally punished.

The modern Church has therefore begun to recognize both problems.

Sexual abuse

and

interference with the investigation of sexual abuse.

That is a major development in the institutional framework.

The same development appears in the Vatican's treatment of **abuse of power and abuse of conscience**. The material records that Pope Francis's 2018 *Letter to the People of God* explicitly addressed sexual abuse, abuse of power, abuse of conscience and the cover-up or perpetuation of abuse. By 2018–19, therefore, the Vatican's public framework had moved beyond the simple category of "bad priests."

The conceptual progression is significant:

sexual abuse

↓

abuse of power

↓

abuse of conscience

↓

cover-up

↓

spiritual abuse

The modern framework increasingly treats these as interconnected dimensions of institutional misconduct.

The 2019 reforms are particularly important in this respect. The material records that Francis removed the **pontifical secret** from abuse accusations, canonical trials and decisions covered by *Vos estis lux mundi* and certain CDF-reserved sexual-abuse offences. At the same time, professional confidentiality and protections for privacy remained. The material specifically warns against describing this as the abolition of secrecy altogether: **pontifical secrecy was removed in these cases, while confidentiality remained**.

This distinction matters for spiritual-abuse cases because the institutional handling of allegations can itself affect victims.

If a person has already experienced religious authority as a source of control, then an opaque institutional process can reproduce some of the same sense of dependency.

The victim reports.

The institution receives the complaint.

The institution controls the canonical process.

The institution possesses the records.

The institution determines what can be disclosed.

The victim may wait for the institution's conclusion.

The material therefore identifies **information control** as one of the most important mechanisms in the broader system.

This is especially visible in Rupnik.

His case involves allegations by more than twenty women, a Jesuit investigation, a finding that the allegations were highly credible, expulsion from the Jesuits and a subsequent Vatican canonical process. Yet the canonical process remained confidential and unresolved as of July 2026. Victims' lawyers criticized the secrecy surrounding the proceedings.

The significance is not that confidentiality automatically proves institutional protection.

It does not.

The significance is that the modern system still contains a tension between:

institutional confidentiality

and

victims' demand for transparency and information.

That tension is central to determining whether the modern machinery genuinely represents a break from earlier mechanisms.

The spiritual-abuse concept therefore cannot be isolated from the question of **institutional accountability**.

The Church may recognize that spiritual abuse exists.

It may broaden the canonical categories.

It may recognize vulnerable adults.

It may create reporting mechanisms.

It may investigate allegations.

But the ultimate test remains what happens when a powerful religious figure is accused.

The Rupnik case provides that test in real time.

The material's conclusion is deliberately cautious:

the modern system has changed, but the evidence does not establish that the older problems of secrecy, delay and institutional conflict have disappeared.

This is why spiritual abuse represents a genuine conceptual advance without automatically proving institutional transformation.

The terminology has changed.

The legal categories have expanded.

The Church now explicitly recognizes vulnerable adults and abuse of authority.

The Vatican has studied whether spiritual abuse itself should become a distinct canonical crime.

Yet the practical question remains whether those concepts produce a different outcome for victims and accused persons.

That is still being tested.

The deeper significance of spiritual abuse is therefore this:

Religious authority can be both the context and the instrument of abuse.

A priest may not merely possess access to a victim because he is physically present.

He may possess access because the victim trusts him.

He may possess information because she confesses to him.

He may possess influence because she depends upon his spiritual guidance.

He may possess additional authority because he controls or influences her religious environment.

And if sexual conduct is then imposed or manipulated through that relationship, the sexual abuse cannot be understood independently of the spiritual power that preceded it.

This produces the central formula of the chapter:

SPIRITUAL TRUST

↓

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

↓

DEPENDENCY

↓

CONTROL OF CONSCIENCE

↓

RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATION

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

↓

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The historical cases demonstrate that the first stages of this structure are old.

The modern cases demonstrate that the same kind of authority relationship can exist today.

The modern Vatican framework is now beginning to name and regulate the problem explicitly.

That is why **spiritual abuse** is not simply another word for sexual abuse.

It identifies a particular **mechanism** by which sexual abuse can occur.

The distinction is decisive.

A sexual predator may seek physical access.

A spiritual abuser can allegedly seek something more fundamental first:

access to the victim's conscience.

Once that access has been obtained, the victim's own religious beliefs, vows, trust and understanding of obedience can potentially become tools of control.

That is the central significance of the modern concept.

It explains how a relationship that begins with **faith, guidance, confession or vocation** can allegedly be transformed into a relationship of **dependency, manipulation and sexual exploitation**.

And it explains why the history of Catholic sexual abuse must include not only children, but also **adult women, nuns, seminarians and other people whose vulnerability arises from their dependence upon religious authority**.

The emergence of spiritual abuse as a recognized problem therefore represents a major expansion of the investigation.

The question is no longer merely:

Who sexually abused whom?

It is also:

Who possessed spiritual authority?

How was that authority acquired?

How did dependency develop?

Was conscience manipulated?

Were religious beliefs or vows used to justify sexual conduct?

Did the institution recognize the abuse?

How did it respond?

Those questions transform the subject from a catalogue of sexual incidents into an examination of **power operating through religion**.

And that is the principal finding established by this part of the material:

where sexual exploitation is intertwined with spiritual authority, the abuse can be simultaneously sexual, psychological, spiritual and institutional—and the religious authority itself can become one of the instruments through which the exploitation is achieved.

The Vatican as a System of Power

The Vatican cannot be understood in this investigation as a single office, a single person, or a perfectly centralized command structure. The material assembled in our investigation instead reveals a **multi-layered institutional system** in which different Vatican bodies and Church authorities possess different forms of power over appointments, discipline, information, diplomacy, safeguarding and abuse cases. These layers can cooperate, reinforce one another, or conflict, which makes the institutional reality considerably more complicated than the idea of a single Vatican authority directing every case.

At the summit of this structure stands the **Pope**. The Pope represents the ultimate canonical authority within the system and can personally intervene in exceptional cases. This authority becomes particularly important in cases where ordinary institutional procedures prove insufficient, as demonstrated by the material concerning papal intervention in major abuse cases and, most recently, the reopening of the Rupnik process after the limitation barrier had initially prevented a formal canonical prosecution.

The Pope therefore occupies the highest point of the institutional hierarchy:

POPE

↓

VATICAN CURIAL OFFICES

↓

NUNCIATURES / BISHOPS / MAJOR SUPERIORS

↓

DIOCESES / RELIGIOUS ORDERS

↓

CLERGY / RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL

↓

VICTIMS

But this hierarchy is not a simple vertical chain. Around it operate **money, appointments, institutional reputation, political relationships, religious authority, confidentiality and international mobility**. These surrounding forces can affect how information moves and how individual cases are handled.

The first major control point beneath the Pope is the **Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**, today the **Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF/DDF)**. The material identifies it as the central Vatican jurisdiction for abuse cases, particularly after the major centralization of clerical sexual-abuse cases beginning in 2001. Before that period, bishops and religious superiors possessed considerably greater practical discretion; after 2001, qualifying cases involving clerical sexual abuse of minors were formally reserved to the CDF.

This historical change is fundamental.

Before centralization

LOCAL BISHOP / RELIGIOUS SUPERIOR

↓

LOCAL HANDLING

↓

POSSIBLE ROME INVOLVEMENT

After 2001

LOCAL CHURCH

↓

CDF

↓

CENTRAL VATICAN JURISDICTION

The material records that the Vatican received approximately **3,400 abuse cases between 2004 and 2014**, defrocked **848 priests**, and imposed lesser penalties on another **2,572**. These figures demonstrate the enormous scale of

cases eventually reaching the Roman system and show that the CDF became a major institutional center for processing abuse allegations.

The CDF/DDF is therefore not simply another Vatican department. It represents the principal point at which abuse cases can enter a **central canonical jurisdiction**.

The second major control point is the **Secretariat of State**.

Its function differs from that of the DDF. The material identifies the Secretariat of State with **high-level coordination, diplomacy, information, political and institutional management**. It is therefore especially important when the investigation moves beyond the formal processing of a canonical abuse case and examines the broader circulation of information through the Holy See.

The McCarrick material provides the clearest example.

The 2020 Vatican report reconstructed the Holy See's institutional knowledge and decision-making by examining **Holy See archives, the Washington nunciature, U.S. diocesan archives and witness testimony**. The investigation therefore demonstrated that information concerning a powerful cleric could move through several layers of the Vatican system rather than remaining solely within the local diocese.

The information pathway identified in the material is particularly revealing:

VIGANÒ

↓

SANDRI / BERTONE

↓

SECRETARIAT OF STATE

↓

HOLY SEE

The report states that in **2006 and 2008**, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò sent memoranda to his superiors concerning McCarrick. Those memoranda referred to allegations and rumors dating back to the 1980s and raised concerns about scandal. His superiors included Cardinal **Tarcisio Bertone** and Archbishop **Leonardo Sandri**, and the material states that Bertone and Sandri shared Viganò's concerns.

This gives the investigation an actual documented information pathway rather than a hypothetical one.

It also allows us to distinguish different levels of **Vatican knowledge**.

A rumor circulating outside Rome represents weak evidence of Roman knowledge.

A local bishop knowing about an allegation is stronger.

A **nuncio** knowing creates a very strong Vatican connection.

A formal case reaching the **CDF** establishes direct Roman case knowledge.

A memorandum reaching the **Secretariat of State** establishes direct senior-level Vatican knowledge.

Information reaching the **Pope personally** represents the highest level of institutional knowledge.

This hierarchy is essential because the phrase **"the Vatican knew"** can otherwise conceal enormous differences.

Who knew?

Which office?

When?

Through which channel?

What authority did that person possess?

What could that person actually do?

These questions must be answered before institutional responsibility can be assigned.

The third control point is the network of **papal nuncios**.

Nuncios provide a potential bridge between Rome and national episcopates. They operate between the Holy See and local Church structures, making them particularly important when information, appointments or problems move between national Churches and Rome. The material explicitly identifies nuncios as one of the principal institutional control points and as a possible bridge between Rome and national episcopates.

This becomes particularly significant in cases involving the **movement of clergy across dioceses and countries**.

The material documents cases in which clergy accused of abuse subsequently worked elsewhere, including international assignments. One ProPublica investigation identified **51 credibly accused U.S. clergy who subsequently worked abroad**, with destinations including Mexico, Ireland, Nigeria and the Philippines. At least **21** were identified in Mexico.

The resulting structure can look like:

DIOCESE A

↓

ACCUSED PRIEST

↓

DIOCESE B / RELIGIOUS ORDER

↓

COUNTRY C

↓

NEW INSTITUTION

↓

POTENTIAL NEW VICTIMS

The Vatican connection cannot simply be assumed in every case. The material makes this point explicitly. If a transfer is entirely diocesan, no Vatican connection has been established merely because the priest is Catholic. If a religious order is involved, a Vatican connection may exist through the governance of the order. If a nuncio or Curial office participates, the Vatican connection becomes direct; if Rome approves or directs the transfer, the connection becomes substantially stronger.

This distinction is crucial.

The investigation is not arguing that every abuse case belongs to a Vatican network.

It is identifying the circumstances in which **Rome actually enters the chain**.

The fourth major control point is the **bishop**.

Bishops possess enormous practical authority at the local level. The material identifies them as responsible for areas including **personnel, transfers and local investigations**. A bishop can therefore determine how an allegation is handled locally, whether a priest remains in ministry, whether information is passed to another institution, and how the case enters—or fails to enter—the wider Church system.

The institutional chain consequently begins locally:

VICTIM

↓

PRIEST / PERPETRATOR

↓

IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR

↓

BISHOP

↓

RELIGIOUS ORDER / VATICAN OFFICE

The bishop is therefore an essential control point between the alleged abuse and Rome.

This is why the investigation distinguishes **local responsibility** from **Roman responsibility**.

If a bishop knows about an allegation and fails to act, that is a local institutional question.

If the bishop reports it to Rome and Rome receives it, the case acquires a Roman dimension.

If Rome directs or supervises the subsequent process, the level of institutional responsibility changes again.

This is the architecture through which actual responsibility can be established rather than assumed.

The fifth control point consists of **major religious superiors**.

Religious orders possess parallel authority structures. A priest who belongs to a religious order may not be governed solely by a diocesan bishop. His religious superior can exercise authority over his assignment, discipline and institutional status. The same applies to women and men religious within their respective communities.

This creates a parallel institutional hierarchy:

POPE

↓

VATICAN

↓

RELIGIOUS ORDER

↓

MAJOR SUPERIOR

↓

RELIGIOUS MEMBER

The resulting system can become complicated when diocesan and religious-order authority overlap.

A priest may work in a diocese while belonging to a religious order.

A religious order may transfer members internationally.

A bishop may know something about the person.

The superior may know something else.

The receiving institution may receive incomplete information.

And Rome may or may not be involved.

The material therefore identifies **information compartmentalization** as one possible model.

Model 1 — Conscious protection

Everyone knows.

Model 2 — Information compartmentalization

The sending institution knows.

The receiving institution does not.

Model 3 — Partial knowledge

The receiving institution knows something is wrong but does not possess the complete history.

Model 4 — Active receiving protection

The receiving institution knows and nevertheless accepts the priest.

This classification is important because these four situations have radically different implications.

They cannot all be called "cover-up."

The material explicitly distinguishes at least four different phenomena often described by that word:

A. Non-reporting
The Church does not notify police.

B. Internal containment
The Church handles the matter internally.

C. Information suppression
The receiving institution is not told.

D. Active obstruction
Someone deliberately interferes with an investigation.

This distinction becomes central to the Vatican's institutional role.

A failure to report is not automatically proof of active obstruction.

Internal handling is not automatically proof that evidence was destroyed.

A receiving institution's ignorance is not automatically proof that the sending institution deliberately concealed information.

The investigation must therefore establish the actual pathway of information.

That is where the **nunciatures** become especially important.

A nuncio can function as a bridge between national episcopates and Rome. If information reaches the nuncio, it becomes evidence of a substantially stronger Vatican connection than a rumor circulating only within a local community. The McCarrick material demonstrates precisely this kind of pathway through the Washington nunciature and the memoranda that ultimately entered the senior Holy See information system.

The sixth control point is the **Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors**.

Its function is different again.

The material identifies the Commission with **safeguarding, oversight, prevention, policy evaluation and survivor engagement**, rather than the central processing of canonical abuse cases. Under *Praedicate Evangelium*, it was incorporated into the DDF while retaining its distinct safeguarding mission, producing an important dual structure:

DDF

→ justice / canonical cases

Pontifical Commission

→ prevention / safeguarding / policy evaluation / survivor engagement.

This dual structure demonstrates that the Vatican system is not simply one judicial office.

It has developed separate functions:

law

case processing

safeguarding

information management

diplomacy

appointments

papal intervention.

The Commission's own 2024 annual report is particularly revealing because it acknowledged that much of the Church still lacked **robust data-collection systems**. Its stated objectives included documenting progress, deficiencies, recommendations, local safeguarding practices, continental variations and Roman Curia practices.

This means that the Vatican has itself created a mechanism capable of asking a difficult question:

How is the Vatican itself implementing safeguarding?

That represents a significant change from a system in which accountability focused primarily upon local clergy.

The material records another development in **2026**. On **20 May 2026**, Pope Leo XIV approved a new statute for the Pontifical Commission, initially *ad experimentum* for three years. The Commission was formally placed within the DDF structure and given the ability to make recommendations to competent Vatican dicasteries when there are repeated violations of safeguarding norms or serious deficiencies in local reporting systems.

This gives the modern system another institutional control point:

LOCAL SAFEGUARDING FAILURE

↓

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION

↓

RECOMMENDATION

↓

COMPETENT VATICAN DICASTERY

The significance is considerable.

The Vatican is no longer merely receiving individual abuse cases.

It is also attempting to identify **repeated institutional failures**.

The seventh control point is the network of **religious orders themselves**.

Religious orders can operate across national borders and maintain schools, seminaries, charitable institutions, missions and residential communities. Their international structure creates legitimate opportunities for clergy and religious personnel to move between countries, but the material demonstrates that the same mobility can also create opportunities for information to become fragmented.

The structure can therefore extend horizontally:

DIOCESE A

↕

DIOCESE B

↕

RELIGIOUS ORDER

↕

COUNTRY A

↕

COUNTRY B

The material emphasizes that this horizontal mobility is why the term **"network"** can legitimately describe the institutional structure without proving the much stronger proposition of a **"centrally directed worldwide sex ring."** The first describes documented connections between institutions; the second would require direct evidence of centralized criminal direction.

This distinction is one of the most important methodological rules of the entire investigation.

The Catholic system is a network.

That does not mean every part of the network participated in abuse.

It does not mean every transfer was intended to conceal abuse.

It does not mean every Vatican office knew about every case.

And it does not mean that a single central authority directed every abuse.

The evidence supports a more precise conclusion: **certain Catholic institutional structures repeatedly created conditions in which abuse could continue**, including concentrated authority, spiritual dependency, secrecy, weak external oversight, geographic transfer, institutional loyalty and reputational incentives to suppress scandal.

This brings us to the eighth control point: **seminaries**.

Seminaries are important because they are environments of formation and access to future clergy. The material therefore identifies them as a distinct institutional control point rather than simply another Catholic building. A person entering a seminary becomes subject to formation authorities, superiors and religious structures while simultaneously moving toward a position of future clerical authority.

This creates another dependency structure:

SEMINARY

↓

FORMATION AUTHORITY

↓

SEMINARIAN

↓

FUTURE CLERICAL STATUS

The significance is twofold.

First, seminarians can themselves be vulnerable to abuse.

Second, the institutions responsible for formation influence who eventually becomes part of the clergy.

This means that institutional accountability begins before ordination.

The ninth control point is the network of **Catholic schools and orphanages**.

The material identifies these as environments with high access to potential victims. They are therefore part of the institutional environment through which Catholic personnel can encounter children and dependent people.

The institutional map consequently extends far beyond churches:

DIOCESES

RELIGIOUS ORDERS

SEMINARIES

SCHOOLS

ORPHANAGES

HOSPITALS / CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

These environments create different kinds of access and dependency.

The material specifically warns that the broader system cannot be reduced to:

male priest → child.

It includes:

clergy → adult religious women

superior → subordinate nun

spiritual director → dependent adult

institution → orphan/student

teacher → child

physician/cleric → vulnerable person.

The institutional map is therefore much larger than the priesthood alone.

Around all these control points sits another layer: **money**.

The material's master Vatican network explicitly places **law, money and prestige** around the institutional system. These forces can intersect with bishops, religious orders and powerful clergy, creating additional incentives and relationships that affect institutional behavior.

The Maciel case demonstrates this particularly strongly.

The material describes the Legionaries of Christ as possessing:

thousands of seminarians

major fundraising capacity

schools and universities

religious houses

charities

political connections

direct papal access

internal surveillance

and

a vow of silence concerning criticism of superiors.

This creates a second layer around the ordinary abuse chain:

ABUSE CHAIN

Victim
↓
Perpetrator
↓
Superior
↓
Bishop / Religious Order
↓
Vatican Office
↓
Investigation / Transfer / Discipline

But surrounding that chain are:

MONEY

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

PAPAL ACCESS

MEDIA INFLUENCE

INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION

VICTIM DEPENDENCY

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

LEGAL / CANONICAL PROTECTION.

This second layer is essential because the most powerful cases in our investigation are not simply stories about individual perpetrators.

They are stories about perpetrators operating within institutions that possess **money, prestige, access and political relationships**.

That is why the Vatican must be examined as a system of power.

The Pope has ultimate canonical authority.

The DDF/CDF processes central abuse cases.

The Secretariat of State manages high-level institutional information and diplomacy.

Nuncios connect Rome with national Churches.

Bishops control local personnel and investigations.

Major superiors control religious orders.

The Pontifical Commission oversees safeguarding and survivor engagement.

Religious orders create parallel international structures.

Seminaries control formation.

Schools and orphanages create access to vulnerable populations.

And Vatican security and information structures can become relevant to the broader question of how sensitive institutional information is managed.

The material concerning Vatican security and operational structures is particularly important in the **Emanuela Orlandi** investigation, but it must be handled separately from the sexual-abuse network unless evidence connects the two. The material explicitly warns that people appearing in the Orlandi dossier's operational layer—including **Camillo Cibin, Renato Buzzonetti,**

Ugo Poletti, Agostino Casaroli, Teofilo Benotti and Lorenzo Antonetti—should not automatically be treated as perpetrators merely because they appear in the dossier. Their appearance places them in an institutional or operational layer requiring analysis, not automatically in the physical-abuse layer.

This distinction is essential to the architecture of the book.

The institutional system can contain people who:

commit abuse

receive allegations

manage cases

control information

supervise institutions

move personnel

protect institutional reputation

investigate misconduct

or

simply appear in an institutional record.

These categories must never be collapsed.

The material formulates this explicitly through **three levels of Vatican responsibility**.

Direct responsibility

A Vatican official personally participated in abuse, trafficking, concealment, obstruction or another specific act.

This requires specific evidence.

Case-management responsibility

Rome received a particular allegation or case and therefore possessed institutional responsibility for its handling.

This can often be documented.

Structural responsibility

Rome designed and maintained the canonical and governance system within which bishops, religious orders and clergy operated.

This is demonstrable from Church law itself.

This three-level distinction is fundamental.

A person can possess structural responsibility without personally committing abuse.

An office can possess case-management responsibility without having ordered the underlying abuse.

A direct perpetrator can be connected to a Vatican institution without that institution being responsible for his individual criminal act.

The investigation therefore has to establish **what kind of responsibility is actually supported by the evidence**.

The complete institutional map developed in the material can consequently be stated as:

POPE

↓

SECRETARIAT OF STATE — high-level coordination, diplomacy, information

DDF / CDF — canonical abuse jurisdiction

↓

NUNCIATURES — Rome ↔ national episcopates

↓

BISHOPS / MAJOR SUPERIORS

↓

DIOCESES / RELIGIOUS ORDERS

↓

PRIESTS / NUNS / MONKS / OTHER RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL

↓

VICTIMS

And around the entire structure:

MONEY

APPOINTMENTS

FRIENDSHIPS

INSTITUTIONAL LOYALTY

REPUTATION

POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

CONFIDENTIALITY

INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY.

This is the Vatican as the investigation actually finds it: **not one command center, but an interconnected hierarchy of control points**.

The system also changed over time.

The material divides its modern history into three broad periods.

Period I — Decentralized Rome, approximately 1940s–2000

Bishops and religious superiors possessed enormous practical discretion. Rome possessed canonical authority, but there was no modern centralized abuse-reporting pipeline. The central question for this period is therefore which cases nevertheless reached Rome and what happened when they did.

Period II — Centralized CDF, 2001–2013

The 2001 reforms centralized qualifying clerical sexual-abuse cases involving minors under the CDF. Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone became central figures in the new system, and Rome subsequently received thousands of cases.

Period III — Safeguarding and reporting architecture, 2013–2026

The Francis period expanded reporting mechanisms, bishop accountability, vulnerable-adult protections, safeguarding and Vatican-level oversight. The Pontifical Commission became part of this developing architecture, while cases such as Rupnik and Sodalitium tested how effectively the new structures worked.

The reforms therefore changed the institutional map.

The Vatican increasingly moved from:

local discretion

toward

centralized case processing

and then toward

centralized safeguarding and institutional accountability.

The 2019 *Vos estis lux mundi* reforms are particularly important because they explicitly recognize **interference with or evasion of civil or canonical investigations**. They also establish reporting mechanisms and apply to senior Church authorities, including bishops and major religious superiors.

The network can therefore be represented as:

PRIEST

↓

VICTIM

↓

BISHOP / SUPERIOR

↓

REPORT OR NON-REPORT

↓

NUNCIO / ROME

↓

VATICAN INVESTIGATION

The legal system itself now recognizes that the problem may occur not only at the first arrow—the abuse—but further down the chain, where institutional actors can fail to report, contain, suppress or obstruct the investigation.

This is one of the most important transformations in the system.

The Vatican's institutional role is therefore no longer merely to determine whether a priest violated a canonical rule.

It increasingly involves determining:

Was the allegation reported?

Who received it?

Was the bishop accountable?

Was the superior accountable?

Was information passed to Rome?

Was the investigation obstructed?

Was the accused transferred?

Was the victim protected?

Did the institution respond appropriately?

The control points determine where those questions can be answered.

The Pope can intervene.

The DDF can process cases.

The Secretariat of State can possess senior-level information.

Nuncios can transmit information between Rome and local Churches.

Bishops can control local personnel and investigations.

Religious superiors can control members of orders.

The Pontifical Commission can identify safeguarding failures.

Religious orders can facilitate international movement.

Seminaries control formation.

Schools and orphanages provide access to vulnerable populations.

And information management determines how much of the institutional history becomes visible outside the system.

The final structure is therefore not a simple pyramid.

It is better understood as a **network of authority and information**:

ROME

↕

NUNCIATURES

↕

BISHOPS

↕

DIOCESES

↕

RELIGIOUS ORDERS

↕

SUPERIOR STRUCTURES

↕

CLERGY / RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL

↕

VICTIMS

while parallel channels connect Rome to:

CASE PROCESSING

SAFEGUARDING

DIPLOMACY

APPOINTMENTS

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

PAPAL INTERVENTION

and **institutional finance and reputation**.

That is the central institutional finding.

The Vatican possesses enormous power over the Catholic system, but that power is distributed across offices and levels. **The Pope, DDF/CDF, Secretariat of State, nuncios, bishops, major religious superiors, religious orders and safeguarding structures do not perform the same function, and evidence connecting one control point to a particular abuse case must be established rather than assumed.**

The resulting picture is therefore more precise than the phrase **"Vatican cover-up."**

It is a system in which **authority, information, money, appointments, religious dependency, institutional reputation and canonical jurisdiction intersect**.

And this gives the investigation its central institutional question:

When Rome acquired knowledge of abuse, through which control point did that knowledge arrive, what authority existed at that point, what action was possible, and did the resulting machinery protect the victim—or primarily protect the institution?

Secrecy and Information Control

Secrecy is one of the most persistent mechanisms appearing throughout the material assembled in this investigation. It appears in different forms and at different levels: confidential canonical proceedings, restricted circulation of allegations, internal investigations, controlled records, limited access to case information, institutional silence and the management of damaging information. Yet secrecy must be treated precisely: **the existence of confidentiality is not, by itself, proof of a crime or a cover-up**. The question is what information was kept confidential, who controlled it, why it was withheld, what obligations existed, and what consequences followed.

This distinction is essential because the Catholic Church has historically possessed legitimate reasons for keeping certain proceedings confidential. Canonical investigations involve allegations against identifiable people, witnesses, victims and sensitive personal information. The modern Vatican itself states that information must be protected for reasons including **privacy, integrity and reputation**, while also recognizing civil reporting obligations. The institutional problem therefore begins not with confidentiality itself, but

with the point at which confidentiality can become a mechanism for preventing accountability.

The investigation has consequently separated several different forms of information control.

CONFIDENTIALITY

↓

protecting sensitive information during a legitimate process

INTERNAL CONTAINMENT

↓

handling allegations within ecclesiastical structures

INFORMATION SUPPRESSION

↓

preventing relevant information from reaching people who need it

NON-TRANSMISSION

↓

failing to provide an accused person's history to a receiving institution

ACTIVE OBSTRUCTION

↓

deliberately interfering with an investigation.

These categories cannot simply be treated as identical. The material explicitly warns against calling every instance of secrecy a "cover-up." A failure to report, an internal canonical investigation, the withholding of information from a receiving institution and deliberate obstruction are different institutional acts and require different evidence.

This distinction becomes particularly important when examining the history of the Vatican itself.

The material identifies a longstanding Catholic institutional capacity for **information gathering, internal surveillance and control of dissent**. The Sodalitium Pianum, for example, operated as a clandestine intelligence and propaganda network involving informants and surveillance. The material does **not** treat that organization as a sexual-abuse network; its relevance is institutional. It demonstrates that the Catholic hierarchy had historical experience operating systems in which information could be collected, classified and controlled inside a highly hierarchical organization.

That historical characteristic becomes relevant when the investigation reaches sexual abuse.

The underlying institutional question is:

Who controls the information?

Not merely:

Who committed the abuse?

The difference is fundamental.

A victim may possess information about an allegation.

A priest may know about an allegation.

A superior may know.

A bishop may know.

A nuncio may know.

A Vatican office may know.

The Pope may eventually know.

But these people do not necessarily possess the same information at the same time, and they do not possess the same authority to act upon it.

The information flow identified in the material therefore looks like:

VICTIM

↑

PRIEST / RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL

↑

SUPERIOR

↑

BISHOP / RELIGIOUS ORDER

↑

NUNCIO / VATICAN OFFICE

↑

ROME

while disciplinary decisions can move downward and personnel transfers can move sideways between institutions.

This means that secrecy can operate at several points in the chain.

A complaint can remain inside a diocese.

A religious order can conduct its own internal investigation.

A bishop can possess information that is not transmitted to another bishop.

A receiving institution can receive an accused priest without receiving his complete history.

A Vatican office can possess a case file that is not publicly accessible.

And a canonical process can proceed without becoming a public criminal proceeding.

Each of these situations is different.

The most important modern example is the **centralization of abuse cases under the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**.

Before 2001, local Church authorities possessed considerably greater practical autonomy in handling abuse allegations. After John Paul II promulgated *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* in 2001, qualifying clerical sexual-abuse cases involving minors became reserved to the CDF. The practical chain became:

LOCAL ALLEGATION

↓

DIOCESAN / RELIGIOUS-ORDER INVESTIGATION

↓

CREDIBLE CASE

↓

CDF IN ROME

↓

ROME DETERMINES PROCEDURE

↓

CANONICAL SANCTION / LOCAL ACTION

↓

POSSIBLE PAPAL DECISION.

This was an enormous change in information architecture.

Rome was no longer merely an institution that could theoretically become aware of serious abuse.

It became a formal **information node and case-management authority**.

The scale demonstrates the importance of this transformation. The material records that in 2012 CDF Prefect William Levada stated that **more than 4,000 cases of sexual abuse of minors had been reported to the CDF during the preceding decade**. Another Vatican statement gave approximately **3,000 diocesan and religious priests whose cases were considered by the CDF between 2001 and 2010**.

These figures must be interpreted carefully.

Case ≠ accusation ≠ substantiated abuse ≠ conviction.

The material specifically warns against equating thousands of cases with thousands of proven perpetrators. Charles Scicluna, discussing approximately 3,000 cases considered during 2001–2010, described the underlying allegations in different categories, including adolescent same-sex relationships, heterosexual relations and prepubescent children.

Nevertheless, the institutional fact remains:

thousands of abuse cases entered the central Vatican system.

That makes information management at Rome one of the most important questions in the entire investigation.

Once information reached the CDF, Rome possessed information that local institutions had transmitted.

The question then becomes:

What happened to it?

Was the case investigated?

Was the priest removed?

Was the priest restricted?

Was the case dismissed?

Was the limitation period applied?

Was information sent back to the local Church?

Was the accused transferred?

Was the victim informed?

Was the information retained?

These questions transform secrecy from an abstract accusation into an institutional process that can actually be examined.

The **Maciel** case demonstrates another form of information control, this time operating within a powerful religious organization. The material describes the

Legionaries of Christ as possessing thousands of seminarians, schools, universities, religious houses, charities, political connections and direct papal access, alongside **internal surveillance and a vow of silence preventing criticism of superiors**.

The control mechanism attributed to Maciel's organization included:

READING CORRESPONDENCE

↓

MONITORING TELEPHONE CALLS

↓

SCRUTINIZING FRIENDSHIPS

↓

SELECTING FAVORED SEMINARIANS

↓

DEMANDING OBEDIENCE

↓

PROHIBITING CRITICISM

↓

IMPOSING SILENCE.

This is important because it demonstrates that information control does not have to originate in the Vatican itself.

It can exist inside a religious order.

The Vatican may then receive information from that order—or fail to receive information that the order possesses.

That creates a fundamental distinction between **institutional secrecy within a religious organization** and **Vatican secrecy**.

The two may overlap.

They may also be entirely separate.

The investigation must therefore establish where information was located at each stage.

The Maciel material also demonstrates why secrecy can be connected to **institutional reputation**.

Maciel's organization was financially powerful and institutionally useful. It possessed fundraising capacity, schools, universities, seminaries, charities and

political connections. Its survival therefore had implications far beyond one individual's reputation.

The institutional incentive can be expressed as:

DAMAGING INFORMATION

↓

THREAT TO REPUTATION

↓

THREAT TO MEMBERSHIP / DONATIONS / PRESTIGE

↓

PRESSURE TO CONTAIN SCANDAL

The material does not establish that every act of confidentiality in the Maciel case was motivated by money or reputation. It does establish that **money, prestige and institutional usefulness formed part of the environment in which protection mechanisms operated**.

That distinction matters.

A motive cannot simply be assumed because an institution benefited from silence.

It must be demonstrated through documents, testimony or identifiable institutional actions.

The investigation therefore treats **reputation as an institutional incentive**, not as automatic proof of intentional concealment.

The Illinois material provides particularly strong evidence for this distinction because it identifies actual institutional decisions rather than merely theorizing about reputation.

The 2023 Illinois Attorney General investigation examined more than **100,000 pages of diocesan documents** and received more than **600 confidential contacts from survivors**. It identified **451 Catholic clerics and religious brothers as substantiated child-sex abusers**, with at least **1,997 survivors**. The investigation found that known child-sex abusers were transferred between parishes and that bishops accepted known abusers from other dioceses while information about their histories was withheld from Catholics and the public.

This is precisely the kind of evidence that makes information control demonstrable.

The issue is no longer simply:

"The Church was secretive."

The evidence identifies:

known abuser

↓

transfer

↓

receiving institution

↓

withheld history

↓

continued access to parishioners

That is a concrete institutional mechanism.

The Illinois Attorney General went further, concluding that leadership decisions and policies allowed known abusers to remain hidden and explicitly stating that officials sometimes **prioritized institutional reputation over children's safety**.

This gives the investigation evidence for two overlapping motivations:

INSTITUTIONAL PRESERVATION

"Do not allow scandal to damage the Church."

and

PERSONAL / INSTITUTIONAL LOYALTY

"Help this priest or religious figure find another position."

These motives can reinforce each other:

protect the institution → protect its personnel

and:

protect its personnel → protect the institution.

The resulting model is much more precise than the word "cover-up":

VICTIM

↓

PERPETRATOR

↓

SUPERIOR / BISHOP / ORDER

↓

COMPLAINT

↓

MINIMIZATION / SUPPRESSION / INTERNAL HANDLING

↓

EUPHEMISTIC DOCUMENTATION

↓

CONTINUED SALARY / SUPPORT

↓

RECOMMENDATION

↓

TRANSFER

↓

RECEIVING BISHOP / ORDER

↓

NEW PARISH

↓

POSSIBLE NEW VICTIMS.

The important point is that **information can be lost at the transfer point**.

The sending institution may know.

The receiving institution may not.

The receiving bishop may therefore make a decision without the information necessary to protect the new community.

The investigation calls this **information compartmentalization**.

It identifies several possible models:

Model 1 — Conscious protection

Everyone knows and nevertheless permits the person to remain.

Model 2 — Information compartmentalization

The sending institution knows, but the receiving institution does not.

Model 3 — Partial knowledge

The receiving institution knows something is wrong but does not possess the complete history.

Model 4 — Active receiving protection

The receiving institution knows and nevertheless accepts the accused person.

These four models are critical because only some demonstrate deliberate concealment.

This is why the book must resist the temptation to turn every transfer into proof of a conspiracy.

The evidence may show negligence.

It may show inadequate information sharing.

It may show deliberate suppression.

It may show active protection.

Those are different findings.

The same principle applies at the Vatican level.

The material's central question is not:

"Did the Vatican know about every abusive priest?"

That would be impossible and unsupported.

The defensible question is:

"When did the Vatican acquire information, through which institutional channels, what authority did it possess, and what did it do with that information?"

This question can actually be answered case by case.

The **McCarrick investigation** is particularly important because the Holy See eventually investigated its own information flow. The 2020 report examined **Vatican archives, the Washington nunciature, U.S. diocesan archives and witness interviews**. This gives the investigation unusually direct evidence concerning what information reached senior Vatican officials.

The material identifies a specific pathway:

VIGANÒ

↓

SANDRI / BERTONE

↓

SECRETARIAT OF STATE

↓

HOLY SEE.

According to the material, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò sent memoranda to his superiors in **2006 and 2008** concerning McCarrick. Those memoranda referred to allegations and rumors dating back to the 1980s and raised concerns about scandal. His superiors included Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone and Archbishop Leonardo Sandri, and the material states that both shared Viganò's concerns.

This is precisely what an information-control investigation requires.

Not merely:

"Rome knew."

But:

Who in Rome knew?

When did they know?

How did they know?

Who received the information?

What authority did they possess?

What did they do afterward?

This approach also prevents the book from assigning collective responsibility to everyone in the Vatican hierarchy simply because they belonged to the institution.

The material distinguishes four categories:

Established perpetrator

Credibly accused / formally investigated

Accused of concealment / institutional failure

Institutional connection only.

This classification is essential for a chapter about secrecy.

A person who appears in a confidential document is not automatically guilty of anything.

A person who receives an allegation is not automatically responsible for the underlying abuse.

A person who fails to transmit information may have institutional responsibility without being a perpetrator.

A person merely connected to an institution should not be classified as an abuser or cover-up participant without evidence.

The information-control model therefore has to preserve these distinctions.

The **2019 reforms** provide another major turning point.

The material records that Francis created mandatory reporting mechanisms through *Vos estis lux mundi* and explicitly included **cover-up and interference** within its framework. In December 2019, Francis also removed the **pontifical secret** from abuse accusations, canonical trials and decisions covered by *Vos estis lux mundi* and the CDF's reserved sexual-abuse offences.

This is one of the clearest institutional changes identified in the material.

The earlier structure can be summarized as:

CONFIDENTIALITY

-

CENTRALIZED CANONICAL FILES

-

LIMITED EXTERNAL VISIBILITY

The 2019 reform changed one crucial element:

PONTIFICAL SECRET NO LONGER APPLIES TO THESE ABUSE CASES.

But the material emphasizes that this does **not** mean that all confidentiality disappeared.

Professional confidentiality remained.

Privacy protections remained.

The integrity of proceedings remained protected.

Civil reporting obligations remained relevant.

Therefore the accurate description is:

The pontifical secret was removed from the specified abuse cases; confidentiality was not abolished.

This distinction is vital.

Calling the reform the **"abolition of secrecy"** would overstate what happened.

Calling it meaningless would also ignore a major institutional change.

The actual result is more precise:

OLD

Pontifical secrecy + confidentiality

↓

2019

Pontifical secrecy removed for specified abuse cases

↓

REMAINING

Professional confidentiality + privacy + procedural protections.

This illustrates the broader theme of this chapter: **secrecy has not disappeared; its legal form has changed**.

The Church itself also changed the conceptual language surrounding secrecy.

Francis's **2018 Letter to the People of God** explicitly referred not only to sexual abuse but to **abuse of power, abuse of conscience, cover-up and perpetuation of abuse**.

This is significant because it recognizes that the institutional problem can exist after the original sexual act.

The original abuse is one event.

The handling of the allegation is another.

The concealment or obstruction of an investigation can be another.

The institutional protection of the accused can be another.

The book therefore needs to examine the entire chain.

ABUSE

↓

DISCLOSURE

↓

REPORT

↓

INVESTIGATION

↓

DISCIPLINE

↓

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

↓

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

The failure can occur at any stage.

This is why **internal investigations** occupy such an important place in the material.

An internal investigation is not inherently illegitimate.

Indeed, the modern Church has developed formal procedures precisely because allegations require investigation.

The problem arises when the same institution has an interest in controlling both the investigation and the reputation of the accused.

This produces the structural question already identified in the material:

Does an internal hierarchical accountability system provide adequate protection when the institution itself has an interest in controlling information?

That question is particularly important because the Vatican occupies an unusual institutional position.

It is simultaneously:

a religious authority

a sovereign state

the supreme governing institution of the Catholic Church

the authority responsible for Catholic canon law.

In an ordinary criminal system, an external state authority can investigate a religious organization.

The Catholic structure can instead operate as:

CATHOLIC INSTITUTION

↓

ALLEGATION

↓

LOCAL CHURCH

↓

BISHOP

↓

VATICAN

The information therefore moves upward through the same religious hierarchy to which the institution belongs.

That is the structural accountability problem.

The Roman Senate's investigation of the Bacchanalia, as discussed in the historical material, involved an **external sovereign authority confronting a religious organization**. The modern Vatican presents a different structure because the institution can be simultaneously the religious organization, the governing hierarchy and a sovereign authority.

This historical comparison does not prove that the Vatican operates unlawfully.

It identifies why the accountability problem is structurally different.

The modern system must therefore be evaluated through information flows.

Who controls the file?

Who can see the allegation?

Who can transmit it?

Who can restrict access?

Who can order an investigation?

Who can discipline the accused?

Who can transfer the accused?

Who can communicate with civil authorities?

Who can disclose the result?

The material's network model captures this:

POPE

↓

SECRETARIAT OF STATE

↓

CDF / DDF

↕

NUNCIATURES

↕

BISHOPS

↔

RELIGIOUS ORDERS

↓

PRIESTS / NUNS / MONKS

↓

VICTIMS

with:

INFORMATION FLOWING UP

DISCIPLINE FLOWING DOWN

TRANSFERS FLOWING SIDEWAYS.

Secrecy can therefore be understood as a problem of **information flow**.

If information moves upward, accountability may increase.

If information stops at one level, accountability may weaken.

If information is deliberately withheld from the next institution, a known risk can move with the person.

If information remains confined to a canonical file, public knowledge may remain limited.

If information is destroyed or deliberately concealed, the problem becomes substantially more serious.

Again, these are different mechanisms.

The book must not collapse them into one word.

This is why the distinction between **confidentiality and suppression** is so important.

Confidentiality can protect:

victims

witnesses

personal information

procedural integrity

the rights of the accused.

Suppression can protect:

institutional reputation

powerful individuals

financial interests

organizational stability.

The same outward appearance—information not being publicly available—can therefore arise from entirely different motives.

Only the evidence can distinguish them.

The **Rupnik** case illustrates the modern version of this problem.

The Jesuits conducted an internal investigation and expelled Rupnik after finding the allegations highly credible. The case subsequently entered a Vatican canonical process after the Pope removed the limitation barrier. Yet the proceedings remained confidential, and lawyers representing the women criticized the secrecy surrounding the tribunal.

This does not prove that the Vatican is protecting Rupnik.

The material specifically requires a more cautious conclusion.

The case demonstrates that:

credible allegations

↓

internal investigation

↓

institutional discipline

↓

Vatican judicial process

can coexist with:

confidential proceedings

limited public information

victims demanding information

continuing institutional controversy.

That is precisely why Rupnik is such an important modern test.

The question is not whether the Church has abandoned secrecy.

It has not.

The question is whether the **new form of confidentiality produces better accountability than the older system of pontifical secrecy and restricted visibility**.

As of July 2026, the evidence does not provide a final answer.

The tribunal remained unresolved.

The Vatican defended confidentiality.

The victims' lawyers criticized it.

The institutional process continued.

The same principle applies to the modern **Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors**.

The Commission's role includes safeguarding, oversight, prevention, policy evaluation and survivor engagement. Its annual reporting also identified weaknesses in data-collection systems across the Church.

This is another important development in information control.

A modern safeguarding system requires not only rules but **data**.

If the Church does not know:

how many allegations exist

where they occurred

which institutions are repeatedly implicated

how cases were resolved

whether bishops complied with reporting rules

whether religious orders repeatedly failed

then institutional oversight becomes difficult.

The material therefore identifies data collection as part of the modern accountability problem.

The absence of robust data does not itself prove intentional secrecy.

It can result from poor administration, fragmented systems, legal restrictions or historical record-keeping problems.

But the institutional consequence is the same:

what cannot be reliably measured is difficult to supervise.

This is why the 2026 safeguarding discussions are important. The Pontifical Commission and Ending Clergy Abuse held structured discussions in Rome concerning **institutional responsibility, justice, victims' rights and**

protection of women religious, priests, seminarians and lay movements.

The institutional system is therefore increasingly examining its own information and accountability structures.

That represents genuine change.

But it does not erase the historical problem.

The material's broader conclusion is that certain Catholic institutional structures repeatedly created conditions in which abuse could continue:

concentrated authority

spiritual dependency

secrecy

weak external oversight

geographic transfer

institutional loyalty

reputational incentives to suppress scandal.

The word **"repeatedly"** is important.

The argument does not require every bishop, every religious order or every Vatican official to participate in concealment.

It requires evidence that the same institutional mechanisms appear in multiple unrelated cases.

That is what turns secrecy from an accusation into a structural finding.

The material consequently proposes a more precise institutional model:

VICTIM

↓

PERPETRATOR

↓

SUPERIOR

↓

BISHOP / RELIGIOUS ORDER

↓

VATICAN OFFICE

↓

INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

↓

TRANSFER / RELOCATION

↓

DISCIPLINE OR SUPPRESSION

↓

EVENTUAL EXPOSURE

↓

CIVIL / CRIMINAL CASE.

Around this chain sit:

MONEY

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

PAPAL ACCESS

MEDIA INFLUENCE

INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION

VICTIM DEPENDENCY

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

LEGAL / CANONICAL PROTECTION.

Secrecy is therefore not an isolated mechanism.

It interacts with all the others.

Money can create incentives for institutional stability.

Reputation can create incentives to prevent scandal.

Hierarchy determines who receives information.

Religious authority determines who is believed.

International mobility creates opportunities for information to become fragmented.

Canonical confidentiality can limit external visibility.

Personal loyalty can encourage protection.

Papal access can provide privileged channels of influence.

None of these mechanisms automatically constitutes a crime.

Together, however, they can create an environment in which abuse becomes harder to expose.

This is the central conclusion supported by the material.

The investigation therefore does not define secrecy as:

"information that the public does not know."

That definition would be uselessly broad.

Instead, secrecy is treated as an **institutional mechanism controlling who knows what, when they know it, and what they can do with that knowledge**.

That gives us measurable questions:

Was the allegation documented?

Who received it?

Was it transmitted upward?

Was it transmitted sideways to another institution?

Was the accused transferred?

Was the receiving institution warned?

Was the victim informed?

Was the case investigated?

Was the investigation obstructed?

Was the record retained?

Was the final decision disclosed?

Was the information withheld because of legitimate confidentiality or because disclosure threatened the institution?

Those questions separate **confidentiality** from **suppression**.

And they separate **institutional failure** from **deliberate concealment**.

The material's strongest evidence comes where those questions can be answered through actual records.

The Illinois investigation provides documentary evidence of withheld histories and transfers.

The McCarrick report provides evidence of information reaching senior Vatican channels.

The CDF records demonstrate that thousands of cases entered the Roman system.

The 2019 reforms demonstrate that the Vatican itself changed the legal status of secrecy in abuse cases.

The Rupnik case demonstrates that confidentiality remains a live institutional issue.

Together, these findings show an evolution rather than a single unchanging system.

The old system relied heavily upon centralized canonical confidentiality and limited external visibility.

The modern system has removed pontifical secrecy from specified abuse cases, created reporting mechanisms and expanded accountability for interference and vulnerable adults.

Yet confidentiality, institutional reputation, information fragmentation and disputes over transparency remain.

That is why the conclusion cannot simply be:

"The Vatican hides everything."

The evidence does not support such a universal statement.

Nor can it be:

"The Vatican solved the secrecy problem."

The evidence does not support that either.

The more defensible conclusion is more uncomfortable:

The Catholic system has repeatedly relied upon internal control of sensitive information, and this has sometimes protected legitimate privacy and procedural integrity but has also, in documented cases, contributed to concealment, information compartmentalization and institutional protection of accused clergy. Modern reforms have reduced some forms of secrecy while leaving substantial confidentiality and institutional control over information in place.

That is the distinction on which the rest of the investigation depends.

Secrecy is not automatically a crime.

Confidentiality is not automatically a cover-up.

An internal investigation is not automatically institutional protection.

But when **known abuse is concealed from a receiving institution, when information is deliberately withheld, when investigations are**

obstructed, or when institutional reputation is explicitly prioritized over victims' safety, the evidence moves from ordinary confidentiality into a much more serious category of institutional failure or deliberate suppression.

The central issue is therefore not whether the Vatican has secrets.

Every large institution has confidential information.

The issue is **what the institution does with information that could protect potential victims**.

If the information is transmitted, investigated and acted upon, confidentiality may serve the process.

If the information is contained, withheld, buried or deliberately kept from those responsible for protecting others, confidentiality can become protection.

And when that protection is repeated across institutions, countries and decades, secrecy stops being merely an administrative characteristic.

It becomes part of the **architecture through which institutional abuse can survive**.

Money and the Vatican

Money occupies a different position from sexual abuse, but within the institutional structure examined in our investigation it cannot be treated as irrelevant background. The material identifies **financial power** as one of the recurring mechanisms surrounding the abuse system, alongside charismatic authority, spiritual authority, institutional secrecy, protection by influential patrons and jurisdictional separation. The central point is not that financial transactions are themselves evidence of sexual abuse, but that **wealth, fundraising capacity and financial influence can give an institution resources, prestige, political relationships and reasons to preserve its stability**.

The investigation's network model therefore deliberately places money outside the immediate abuse chain.

The first layer is:

VICTIM
↓
PERPETRATOR
↓
IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR
↓

BISHOP / RELIGIOUS ORDER
↓
VATICAN OFFICE
↓
INVESTIGATION / TRANSFER / DISCIPLINE / SUPPRESSION
↓
EVENTUAL EXPOSURE

Around this chain sits a second layer:

MONEY

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

PAPAL ACCESS

MEDIA INFLUENCE

INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION

VICTIM DEPENDENCY

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

LEGAL / CANONICAL PROTECTION.

This distinction is fundamental. Money does not have to appear in the sexual-abuse act itself to matter to the institutional history. Its importance lies in what financial power can make possible: the construction of large organizations, recruitment and expansion, access to influential figures, political relationships, professional legal and administrative resources, and the preservation of institutional prestige.

The clearest example in our material is **Marcial Maciel and the Legion of Christ**.

Maciel's importance was not limited to the allegations made against him. His organization possessed **thousands of seminarians, huge fundraising capacity, schools and universities, religious houses, charities, political connections and direct papal access**. The same structure also included internal surveillance and a vow of silence preventing criticism of superiors.

This combination is precisely why Maciel became such an important test case.

His organization was simultaneously:

RELIGIOUS

INSTITUTIONALLY SUCCESSFUL

FINANCIALLY POWERFUL

POLITICALLY CONNECTED

CONNECTED TO THE VATICAN

and

CAPABLE OF RECRUITING LARGE NUMBERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

The investigation therefore does not treat the Legion's money as proof that its leaders protected abuse because of money. Rather, the material establishes a structure in which **financial success and institutional influence existed alongside allegations and mechanisms of protection**. The question is whether those forms of power helped create the extraordinary longevity of the organization and its founder.

The material describes this mechanism particularly clearly:

Maciel

↓

sexual-abuse allegations

↓

Legionary institutional structure

↓

money / fundraising

↓

recruitment of young people

↓

internal secrecy

↓

protection mechanisms

↓

Vatican relationships

↓

prolonged failure to resolve allegations.

That is the financial dimension of the abuse story.

The significance of money becomes even clearer when we examine **institutional usefulness**.

A religious organization that is small, poor and politically irrelevant has fewer resources and fewer powerful relationships to deploy when its leadership is challenged. A large organization with extensive fundraising, schools, seminaries, charities and political connections occupies a different position. Its collapse could affect thousands of members, large financial operations and relationships extending into the highest levels of the Church.

The material explicitly identifies this phenomenon in the Maciel case. The Vatican was fascinated by the Legion's **recruitment of seminarians, priestly vocations and enormous financial revenue**, while Maciel demonstrated substantial political and media connections. The investigation identifies this as part of the explanation for what it calls the **"blindness that comes from success."**

This gives us an important institutional mechanism:

SUCCESS

↓

MONEY

↓

PRESTIGE

↓

POLITICAL / ECCLESIASTICAL ACCESS

↓

INSTITUTIONAL USEFULNESS

↓

GREATER RESISTANCE TO CHALLENGE

The final arrow must be expressed carefully.

The material does not establish that every successful Catholic organization protects abuse.

It establishes that **institutional success can create conditions in which powerful organizations become harder to challenge**, and Maciel provides the strongest example in our material.

The Vatican's own later description of the Maciel system reinforces this conclusion. According to the material, the Vatican's 2010 apostolic visitation found Maciel's conduct confirmed by **"incontrovertible testimonies"** and described the institutional mechanisms surrounding him: relationships that generated trust, cultivated silence, discredited or distanced people who questioned him, and concern about damage to the Legion's reputation.

The structure can therefore be stated without exaggeration:

CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

•

INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS

•

FINANCIAL POWER

•

LOYALTY

•

INTIMIDATION / DISCREDITING

•

REPUTATION PROTECTION

=

PREDATOR INSULATION.

This is one of the strongest findings in the material because it does not depend upon speculation about abstract Vatican motives. It is based upon the institutional description preserved in our accumulated investigation.

Money also matters because it can create **access**.

The material repeatedly places money beside **papal access and political influence**. In the Maciel case, fundraising capacity and political connections existed alongside direct relationships with powerful Vatican figures. The organization therefore had resources that could be converted into institutional visibility and influence.

This does not mean that money literally purchases papal decisions.

The evidence does not support such a universal claim.

The stronger conclusion is that **financial success can increase an organization's institutional importance**, and institutional importance can increase its access to powerful decision-makers.

The chain is therefore:

FINANCIAL SUCCESS

↓

ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

↓

INSTITUTIONAL IMPORTANCE

↓

ACCESS TO POWERFUL FIGURES

↓

GREATER POLITICAL / ECCLESIASTICAL INFLUENCE

The Maciel case demonstrates this particularly clearly.

The financial dimension becomes even more significant when the investigation turns from religious organizations to the **Vatican's own financial structures**, particularly the **Institute for the Works of Religion (IOR)**.

Here the evidence concerns a different kind of financial power.

Maciel's financial power came primarily from an enormous religious organization and fundraising network.

The IOR represents **institutional financial power at the Vatican itself**.

The material surrounding the IOR describes a financial institution with an unusually powerful and secretive position within the Vatican system. Its historical operation involved international financial relationships, political connections, offshore structures and conflicts over transparency and regulation. These financial scandals are not themselves evidence of sexual abuse. Their relevance to this book is that they demonstrate how **financial power, institutional sovereignty and secrecy can intersect inside the same governing environment that also controls religious and canonical institutions**.

This is why the IOR belongs in the book.

Not because:

IOR = sexual abuse.

That proposition is not established.

But because:

IOR = major Vatican financial power

and:

Vatican financial power = part of the broader institutional environment in which relationships of political influence, secrecy and protection can operate.

The material specifically identifies **Marcinkus** as the clearest example of this second form of financial power. His documented position was extraordinarily important: he was **chief of the IOR**, possessed major Vatican financial

authority and had relationships involving Roberto Calvi, Banco Ambrosiano and Michele Sindona.

The investigation therefore places two different financial structures side by side:

MACIEL

Fundraising

↓

religious organization

↓

seminarians / schools / charities

↓

political relationships

↓

papal access

↓

institutional protection

MARCINKUS

IOR

↓

Vatican financial power

↓

Banco Ambrosiano / Calvi

↓

international financial relationships

↓

political / institutional influence

The two structures must not be merged.

Maciel's financial empire and Marcinkus's IOR position are **different forms of financial power**.

But both demonstrate the same broader institutional principle:

money can increase the power and usefulness of an individual or organization inside a hierarchical institution.

The Marcinkus material is especially important because it demonstrates that Vatican financial power could intersect with political and criminal environments. Our investigation documents:

Marcinkus

→ **IOR**

→ **Calvi / Banco Ambrosiano**

→ **Pazienza**

→ **international financial and intelligence environment**.

Separately:

De Pedis

→ **Banda della Magliana**

→ **Roman criminal environment**.

And:

Abbruciati

→ **Banda della Magliana**

→ **attempted assassination of Banco Ambrosiano executive Roberto Rosone**.

This creates a documented intersection between:

VATICAN FINANCE

and

ROMAN ORGANIZED CRIME.

But that intersection must be described accurately.

The material does **not** establish that every criminal figure connected to the Ambrosiano environment was part of a Vatican sexual-abuse network. Nor does it establish that the financial relationship itself proves sexual exploitation. What it establishes is a financial environment in which Vatican officials and people connected to organized crime operated in overlapping circles.

That distinction becomes particularly important when the investigation reaches **Emanuela Orlandi**.

The financial dimension of the Orlandi case is one of the reasons the case cannot be reduced to a simple kidnapping narrative. The material identifies a chronology in which the **1981–82 IOR/Ambrosiano crisis**, the collapse of Banco Ambrosiano and the death of Roberto Calvi in June 1982 preceded the disappearances of Mirella Gregori in May 1983 and Emanuela Orlandi in June 1983.

The chronology is:

1981–82

IOR / Ambrosiano crisis

↓

Calvi collapse

↓

June 1982

Calvi dies

↓

financial and political fallout

↓

May 1983

Mirella Gregori disappears

↓

June 1983

Emanuela Orlandi disappears.

The material explicitly cautions that this chronology **does not prove causation**. But it makes the financial hypothesis rationally worth examining.

The investigation therefore treats money as one possible explanatory layer rather than automatically as the motive.

The Orlandi material records a hypothesis in which criminal interests allegedly supplied money to Vatican channels and the kidnapping could have been used as leverage to recover money. This was associated in the material with the financial track pursued by prosecutor Giancarlo Capaldo.

But again, this is where evidentiary discipline becomes essential.

The financial connection:

Marcinkus → IOR → Calvi / Ambrosiano

is documented within our material.

The proposition:

Orlandi kidnapping → financial leverage over Vatican interests

remains a hypothesis.

And the stronger proposition:

Vatican financial network → organized sexual exploitation → Orlandi kidnapping

is **not established**.

The material itself identifies the Marcinkus–Orlandi sexual/criminal hypothesis as an **open but substantially weaker evidentiary branch** than the documented institutional abuse and Maciel cases.

This distinction actually strengthens the book.

It allows us to show that the financial evidence has different levels of certainty.

Established

Marcinkus was a major IOR figure.

The IOR had major financial power.

Marcinkus had relationships involving Calvi and the Banco Ambrosiano environment.

Maciel's organization possessed enormous fundraising capacity.

Maciel possessed significant political and Vatican access.

Alleged / unresolved

Financial leverage connected to the Orlandi disappearance.

Marcinkus's alleged sexual relationships with women supplied through De Pedis.

A financial motive connecting the Orlandi kidnapping to Vatican interests.

Not established

A centrally directed Vatican sexual-trafficking operation funded through the IOR.

The book must preserve these distinctions.

The purpose of the financial chapter is not to turn every Vatican financial scandal into an abuse allegation.

It is to demonstrate **how financial power can reinforce institutional power**.

This mechanism operates through several channels.

1. Organizational capacity

Money allows institutions to expand.

2. Recruitment

Financially powerful organizations can establish seminaries, schools, charities and religious houses.

3. Prestige

Large financial success can be interpreted as evidence of institutional effectiveness or divine favor.

4. Political access

Powerful institutions can cultivate relationships with political and ecclesiastical figures.

5. Papal access

Organizations regarded as successful or strategically useful may obtain privileged relationships with senior Church authorities.

6. Reputation

Financially significant organizations have more to lose from scandal.

7. Institutional survival

The collapse of a powerful organization can threaten jobs, institutions, charitable projects, investments and relationships.

These mechanisms do not automatically produce protection.

But they create the **conditions in which protection can become institutionally attractive**.

The material's analysis of Maciel is especially direct on this point. It identifies the **"blindness that comes from success"** as one of the factors explaining his extraordinary position within the Church. His recruitment success, priestly vocations, financial revenue, political connections and ability to impress John Paul II all contributed to his institutional importance.

The important phrase is not simply **money**.

It is:

money + success + ideology + access + usefulness.

The material identifies several factors surrounding Maciel:

financial revenue

organizational success

political and media connections

ideological proximity to John Paul II

anti-communist usefulness

papal access.

This combination demonstrates why financial power cannot be separated from the broader political environment.

The Vatican is not simply a religious organization.

It is also a sovereign institution with diplomatic relationships, political interests, financial assets and international networks.

The material's institutional model therefore surrounds the abuse chain with:

money

political influence

papal access

media influence

institutional reputation.

Money can reinforce each of the others.

Money + political relationships can create influence.

Money + papal access can create institutional prestige.

Money + media influence can affect public reputation.

Money + institutional reputation can create powerful incentives to avoid scandal.

Money + religious authority can make an organization appear extraordinarily successful.

Again, none of these combinations proves criminal conduct.

They explain the **environment of power** in which institutional decisions occur.

This is particularly important when examining why an institution might resist damaging information.

Suppose a powerful religious organization faces allegations.

The institution may fear:

loss of donations

loss of membership

loss of vocations

loss of schools or charitable programs

loss of political influence

loss of papal prestige

damage to the Church's reputation.

The material's broader investigation identifies exactly this relationship between **reputation and money**. It describes financial power as one of the recurring mechanisms and institutional reputation as another.

The mechanisms can reinforce each other:

FINANCIAL SUCCESS

↓

INSTITUTIONAL PRESTIGE

↓

POLITICAL / ECCLESIASTICAL ACCESS

↓

REPUTATIONAL VALUE

↓

FEAR OF SCANDAL

↓

PRESSURE TO PROTECT INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY

This is the financial logic of institutional protection.

It is not the claim that every official personally thought:

"We must protect this abuser because he makes money."

The evidence does not support such a universal statement.

The stronger and more defensible conclusion is that **financially powerful institutions have more institutional assets at stake when scandal occurs**, and this can create incentives for stability, reputation management and resistance to damaging information.

Maciel provides the strongest case.

The IOR provides the clearest example of financial power located directly within the Vatican's governing structure.

The Marcinkus–Calvi environment demonstrates the intersection of Vatican finance with broader political and criminal networks.

The Orlandi financial hypothesis demonstrates why those networks became relevant to a disappearance occurring shortly after the Ambrosiano crisis.

But these remain different evidentiary categories.

The book should therefore resist the temptation to create one enormous financial conspiracy from separate facts.

Instead, it should show the actual relationships.

MACIEL

→ fundraising empire

→ institutional expansion

→ political connections

→ papal access

→ allegations

→ institutional protection.

MARCINKUS

→ IOR

→ Vatican financial authority

→ Ambrosiano / Calvi

→ political and financial networks.

ORLANDI

→ disappearance

→ disputed De Pedis connection

→ alleged financial leverage

→ unresolved hypothesis.

That structure is far more powerful than simply saying **"the Vatican has money."**

The investigation has established something more specific:

financial power is one of the forces surrounding the institutional abuse system.

The evidence is strongest where money is connected to identifiable organizational behavior.

Maciel's fundraising empire coincided with enormous institutional success.

The Legion's financial and organizational importance coincided with allegations against its founder and prolonged institutional protection.

The Vatican financial system under Marcinkus possessed extraordinary power and became involved in major financial controversies.

And the broader Vatican network operated through institutions whose prestige, political relationships and financial interests could make scandal costly.

The financial question therefore becomes part of the larger institutional equation:

AUTHORITY

-

SECRECY

-

REPUTATION

-

MONEY

-

ACCESS

=

INSTITUTIONAL POWER.

When that power is used responsibly, it can support schools, charities, religious communities and legitimate Church activity.

When it is confronted with allegations of abuse, however, the same power can create **institutional incentives to preserve stability and reputation**.

That is the point at which money becomes relevant to the abuse story.

Not because every financial transaction conceals a sexual crime.

Not because every wealthy Catholic organization protects predators.

Not because the IOR itself constitutes an abuse network.

But because **financial power can make institutions larger, more influential, more politically connected and more invested in protecting their reputation**.

And the investigation repeatedly finds that **reputation is one of the forces surrounding institutional protection**.

This is also why money must be kept separate from proof of individual guilt.

A priest receiving financial support is not thereby an abuser.

A bishop managing Church assets is not thereby part of a cover-up.

An IOR official handling controversial transactions is not thereby implicated in sexual abuse.

A religious order possessing enormous wealth is not thereby an abuse organization.

The evidence must establish the connection in each individual case.

The book's four-category system remains essential:

 Established perpetrator

 Credibly accused / formally investigated

 Accused of concealment / institutional failure

 Institutional connection only.

Money can appear in any of these categories, but it does not determine them.

This is particularly important for **Marcinkus**.

His financial role is documented.

His IOR position is documented.

His relationship with the Ambrosiano environment is documented.

The sexual allegations concerning women supplied through De Pedis are **allegations**, and the material specifically says they must not be transformed into established fact.

The same rule applies to Emanuela Orlandi.

The financial environment surrounding the Vatican and Ambrosiano is real.

The disappearance is real.

The alleged financial motive is a serious hypothesis preserved in the material.

But the connection between those elements remains unresolved.

The book therefore gains credibility by saying exactly where the evidence stops.

The financial dimension also helps explain why the investigation is concerned with **institutional responsibility rather than only individual perpetrators**.

An individual predator may have sexual motives.

An institution may have different motives:

protect reputation

preserve donations

avoid scandal

protect political relationships

maintain organizational stability

avoid financial liability

preserve institutional prestige.

These motives can exist even when the institution itself is not participating in the underlying sexual abuse.

That is why the abuse system must be examined at two levels.

Level One — The abuse

Who abused whom?

Level Two — The institution

What did the institution have to lose if the abuse became public?

The second question is where money becomes relevant.

A powerful religious organization can possess enormous **financial and reputational capital**.

When allegations threaten that capital, institutional actors may face conflicting responsibilities:

protect victims

versus

protect the institution.

The material's investigation repeatedly identifies this tension.

The strongest documented example remains Maciel.

His organization was financially successful, politically connected and deeply embedded in the Catholic hierarchy. Allegations existed within the Vatican system, yet his institutional rise continued for decades.

The Vatican eventually investigated and sanctioned him.

But the central institutional question remains:

Why did financial and organizational success coexist for so long with unresolved allegations?

That is a legitimate historical question because the material provides evidence for both sides of the equation:

allegations and institutional protection

on one side,

and

money, recruitment, prestige and political usefulness

on the other.

The investigation therefore arrives at a broader conclusion.

Money is not the cause of Catholic sexual abuse.

The material does not establish that.

Money is not proof of a Vatican sexual network.

The material does not establish that either.

But:

financial power can reinforce institutional protection by increasing organizational usefulness, political access, prestige, reputational stakes and the cost of institutional collapse.

That conclusion is directly consistent with the investigation's master model, which places **money alongside political influence, papal access, media influence, institutional reputation, victim dependency and religious authority** as the surrounding forces that can determine whether apparently separate abuse cases form part of a recurring institutional pattern.

The financial story therefore does not stand outside the abuse investigation.

It surrounds it.

Money builds institutions.

Institutions create authority.

Authority creates access.

Access creates influence.

Influence creates prestige.

Prestige raises the cost of scandal.

And when allegations threaten a powerful institution, the resulting conflict is no longer simply between a victim and a perpetrator.

It becomes a conflict between **truth and institutional preservation**.

The evidence in our material shows that this conflict has occurred repeatedly enough to make money an essential part of the institutional analysis—even though **financial power must never itself be mistaken for proof of sexual criminality**.

Marcinkus: The Financial Power Center

Paul Marcinkus occupies a unique position in the reconstruction developed in our material because his documented career connects the **financial power of the Vatican** with the later, much more controversial **Orlandi reconstruction**. The first part of that connection is firmly established: Marcinkus was a leading figure of the **Institute for the Works of Religion (IOR)** and became deeply involved in the financial world surrounding the Vatican, Roberto Calvi, Banco Ambrosiano and other figures in the international financial and political environment. The second part—the allegations concerning women, sexual exploitation and Emanuela Orlandi—belongs to a different evidentiary category and must be kept separate even though the two strands meet around Marcinkus.

Marcinkus therefore has to be introduced first through what is documented.

He was not a peripheral Vatican official who happened to appear in a financial scandal. He occupied a position at the center of Vatican financial power. The material identifies him as **IOR chief**, a major Vatican financial figure, and as someone connected to **Roberto Calvi and the Banco Ambrosiano affair**, as well as to **Francesco Pazienza** and the wider network surrounding Vatican finance. It also records that he survived demands for his resignation and that he was protected politically by **John Paul II**.

His position can therefore be represented simply:

PAUL MARCINKUS

↓

IOR

↓

VATICAN FINANCIAL POWER

↓

BANCO AMBROSIANO

↓

ROBERTO CALVI

↓

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL / POLITICAL NETWORKS

This financial structure is not a theory constructed from the later Orlandi allegations. It is the documented institutional background from which the Marcinkus question begins.

The Banco Ambrosiano affair was one of the greatest financial crises to touch the Vatican in the twentieth century. The chronology preserved in our material places the crisis immediately before the disappearance of Emanuela. On **31 May 1982**, the Bank of Italy reported Banco Ambrosiano's debt risks at approximately **$1.3 billion**. On **17 June 1982**, Roberto Calvi, the bank's chairman, was found dead beneath Blackfriars Bridge in London. On **6 August 1982**, the Italian government ordered the liquidation of Banco Ambrosiano.

The following year, the chronology reaches Emanuela:

1981–82

IOR / Ambrosiano crisis

↓

31 May 1982

Bank of Italy reports enormous Ambrosiano debt exposure

↓

17 June 1982

Calvi dies in London

↓

6 August 1982

Banco Ambrosiano liquidation

↓

1983

Holy Year / Vatican financial pressure

↓

22 June 1983

Emanuela Orlandi disappears.

The chronology by itself does not prove that the Ambrosiano crisis caused the disappearance. But it establishes why the financial environment must be examined when reconstructing what happened to Emanuela. The disappearance occurred only about one year after the collapse of the Ambrosiano system and during a period in which the Vatican was dealing with enormous financial consequences.

The subsequent financial history reinforces the importance of Marcinkus.

On **25 May 1984**, Marcinkus and de Bonis signed an agreement in Geneva involving a payment of **$242 million** to compensate Banco Ambrosiano's small shareholders. The material therefore places Marcinkus directly within the institutional response to the financial catastrophe.

Three years later, on **20 February 1987**, Milanese investigating judge Renato Bricchetti issued arrest warrants for Marcinkus and two collaborators, **Luigi Mennini and Pellegrino de Strobel**, in connection with the collapse of Calvi's bank. The existence of the warrant is a documented part of the financial history; it should not be confused with a final finding of criminal guilt.

The financial branch of the investigation therefore has a substantial documentary foundation:

MARCINKUS

→ **IOR**

→ **AMBROSIANO**

→ **CALVI**

→ **FINANCIAL COLLAPSE**

→ **$242 MILLION SETTLEMENT**

→ **CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION / ARREST WARRANT**

This is the Marcinkus who is firmly established in the material.

But there is another Marcinkus.

That second figure emerges through the testimony of **Sabrina Minardi**, former partner of Enrico "Renatino" De Pedis and one of the principal witnesses in the Orlandi branch of our investigation. Her allegations place Marcinkus inside a very different environment: one involving women, alleged prostitution, De Pedis's criminal network and ultimately the disappearance of Emanuela.

This second branch must not simply be merged with the first.

The material classifies Marcinkus's status carefully:

Documented

IOR chief

major Vatican financial power

Calvi / Ambrosiano relationship

Pazienza relationship

survival of demands for resignation

protection by John Paul II

Alleged

sexual relationship / exploitation involving women

De Pedis allegedly supplying women to him

involvement in the Orlandi kidnapping

connection to the alleged sexual incident involving Emanuela

possible relationship with a Vatican / organized-crime sexual network.

The distinction is fundamental.

The financial Marcinkus is a documented historical figure.

The sexual-exploitation Marcinkus is principally reconstructed through testimony and allegations.

The Orlandi Marcinkus is a hypothesis constructed from the convergence—or possible convergence—of several strands.

The strongest direct source for the sexual allegations is Minardi herself. The material records that *Atto di dolore* reproduces her statement that she procured prostitutes for Marcinkus and describes the alleged residence at **Via di Porta Angelica**. It also records her statement that she knew Marcinkus through De Pedis and that she associated the possible motive for the Orlandi kidnapping with money laundering.

The material also records independent reporting in **Corriere della Sera** that Minardi claimed she personally supplied prostitutes to Marcinkus and that investigators had identified an apartment corresponding to her description.

This makes the allegation significant enough to include in the reconstruction.

But it does not make every subsequent statement by Minardi automatically true.

That distinction is particularly important because the material also records serious problems with her testimony. Rome prosecutors ultimately regarded her as unreliable, identifying contradictions and implausibilities in her statements. *Atto di dolore* records that she alternated between accurate recollections of names, places and events and accounts that investigators considered incompatible with reality.

This means that Minardi should neither be dismissed wholesale nor treated as an infallible witness.

The more useful approach, established in our investigation, is to break her testimony into individual propositions:

Minardi proposition	Status in our material
She knew De Pedis	Established
She knew people in his criminal environment	Strongly supported
She knew Marcinkus	Alleged / potentially corroborable
She supplied women to Marcinkus	Allegation requiring corroboration
De Pedis knew Marcinkus	Important allegation
Emanuela was transported as she described	Unresolved
Vatican vehicle was involved	Unresolved
Vatican priest received Emanuela	Unresolved
Marcinkus ordered the kidnapping	Unproven
Emanuela was killed as Minardi described	Unproven / contradicted by chronology

This method is especially important for Marcinkus because the documented financial relationship gives the later allegations a very different significance from a completely unsupported accusation against an unknown person.

There is a real historical connection between Marcinkus and the Vatican financial system.

There is a real historical connection between De Pedis and the Roman criminal environment.

There is testimony placing Minardi between De Pedis and Marcinkus.

And there is testimony placing Emanuela in a chain that allegedly moved from De Pedis's environment toward a Vatican-connected man.

The question is whether these strands converge.

The material provides one particularly important documented bridge between the criminal and financial worlds.

On **27 April 1982**, Banda della Magliana member **Danilo Abbruciati** attacked Banco Ambrosiano executive **Roberto Rosone** and was killed during the confrontation. This places a member of the Roman criminal organization directly within the Ambrosiano financial environment.

The structure therefore becomes:

VATICAN

↓

MARCINKUS / IOR

↓

CALVI / AMBROSIANO

↕

ABBRUCIATI

↓

BANDA DELLA MAGLIANA

This does **not** establish that De Pedis himself participated in the Rosone attack.

It does not establish that the Banda della Magliana kidnapped Emanuela.

It does not establish that Marcinkus ordered the kidnapping.

But it does establish that the worlds of **Vatican finance and Roman organized crime were not completely separate worlds**.

That makes Minardi's alleged Marcinkus–De Pedis relationship an important investigative lead rather than an arbitrary connection.

The material describes De Pedis as a senior Banda della Magliana figure and Minardi's former partner. His alleged connections include:

Marcinkus

Vatican financial interests

women allegedly supplied to Marcinkus

the Orlandi kidnapping

a Vatican vehicle / clerical handover.

Again, these must be separated according to their evidentiary status.

The documented financial environment is one thing.

The alleged personal relationship is another.

The alleged sexual network is another.

The alleged kidnapping connection is another.

The possible relationship between all four is the hypothesis.

This is precisely where Marcinkus becomes the **bridge between the financial chapter and the Orlandi reconstruction**.

Before Marcinkus, the two subjects can appear unrelated:

VATICAN FINANCE

→ IOR

→ Ambrosiano

→ Calvi

and:

EMANUELA ORLANDI

→ disappearance

→ De Pedis

→ Vatican vehicle

→ alleged clerical transfer.

Marcinkus provides the possible connection:

IOR / VATICAN FINANCE

↕

MARCINKUS

↕

DE PEDIS

↕

ORLANDI HYPOTHESIS.

The connection is not yet a proven organizational chart.

It is the intersection that our reconstruction needs to examine.

The most important development in this direction comes from **Sabrina Minardi's account of Emanuela's alleged transfer**.

The material records her claim that De Pedis kidnapped Emanuela and that she was eventually delivered to a Vatican-connected man. Another account describes a **Vatican-plated Mercedes** and a high prelate whom De Pedis allegedly identified to Minardi as Marcinkus.

This creates a striking three-stage structure:

DE PEDIS NETWORK

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN VEHICLE

↓

APPARENTLY CLERICAL MAN

↓

POSSIBLE MARCINKUS / VATICAN INTERMEDIARY

The critical problem is identification.

Was the clerical-looking man actually Marcinkus?

The material does not allow us to state that as fact.

Indeed, the investigation developed an important alternative: **the man could have been an intermediary**.

The reasoning is straightforward.

If Marcinkus was a senior Vatican figure and Minardi already knew him, there would be no obvious operational necessity for him personally to collect Emanuela. A lower-level priest or security official could physically receive her and subsequently deliver her to another Vatican figure.

This produces two major possibilities:

Scenario A — Marcinkus personally received Emanuela

The man seen in the Vatican vehicle was Marcinkus, despite the uncertainty surrounding the identification.

Scenario B — Vatican intermediary

De Pedis network

↓

Emanuela

↓

Vatican-plated vehicle

↓

intermediary priest / official

↓

Marcinkus or another senior figure.

The second scenario is particularly important because it separates **physical custody** from **ultimate authority**.

A senior figure does not necessarily have to appear at the moment of transfer.

The same institutional logic appears elsewhere in the Orlandi reconstruction.

The material identifies:

Casaroli

→ secret / compartmentalized operation

Cibin

→ security / transport

Buzzonetti

→ medical channel

Poletti

→ high-level Roman ecclesiastical connection

Piovanelli

→ alleged 1983 London flight request

Marcinkus

→ financial / alleged sexual connection.

This is important because it prevents Marcinkus from becoming the sole explanation for the entire Orlandi mystery.

If an organized operation existed, different people could theoretically have performed different functions.

One person could control money.

Another could control security.

Another could handle medical matters.

Another could handle international movement.

Another could deal with political or ecclesiastical matters.

Another could physically transport the person.

The working model therefore became:

VATICAN / ROME

↓

MARCINKUS — financial / alleged sexual branch

CASAROLI — alleged secret operation

POLETTI — alleged high-level Roman connection

CIBIN — security / transport

BUZZONETTI — medical channel

↓

DE PEDIS NETWORK

↓

EMANUELA

↓

POSSIBLE VATICAN TRANSFER

This remains a **working hypothesis**, not a demonstrated organizational chart.

The financial context nevertheless gives the hypothesis an important background.

Minardi herself initially associated the possible motive for the kidnapping with **money laundering**, specifically recalling Marcinkus's position at the IOR and his relationship with De Pedis. Her exact recollection of the financial role was uncertain, and the material records her own caveat that these were memories.

But the hypothesis is not based upon that statement alone.

The broader chronology contains:

IOR / Ambrosiano crisis

↓

Calvi

↓

Vatican financial exposure

↓

Roman criminal connections to the Ambrosiano environment

↓

De Pedis / Marcinkus allegations

↓

Emanuela's disappearance.

This convergence is why the financial branch matters.

At the same time, the investigation explicitly rejects the leap from convergence to certainty.

We cannot write:

"Marcinkus controlled the IOR, therefore he ordered Emanuela's kidnapping."

That is not logically valid.

Nor can we write:

"De Pedis was connected to the Ambrosiano environment, therefore he kidnapped Emanuela for Marcinkus."

That too is an unsupported leap.

The proper reconstruction is:

Marcinkus ↔ IOR ↔ Calvi / Ambrosiano — strong.

De Pedis ↔ Roman criminal environment — strong.

De Pedis ↔ Marcinkus — important allegation / some supporting testimony.

Minardi ↔ De Pedis — strongly established.

Minardi → alleged women supplied to Marcinkus — allegation.

Minardi → alleged Emanuela transfer — unresolved.

Marcinkus → Orlandi kidnapping — unproven.

This hierarchy is essential because the Marcinkus chapter sits precisely at the boundary between **documented history and reconstruction**.

The financial side gives us solid ground.

The Orlandi side takes us into testimony and inference.

The two can be connected, but the connection must be argued rather than simply declared.

There is another reason Marcinkus matters: the material contains a separate allegation involving **blackmail**.

A 2013 *Corriere della Sera* article discussed claims concerning **Baroness Jeannette de Rothschild** and an alleged blackmail operation involving Marcinkus. The material explicitly states that this does not establish the story as fact, but regards it as relevant because it introduces another possible distinction between Marcinkus as a potential participant or target within a broader political environment.

This creates yet another layer:

Marcinkus

→ financial power

→ Vatican politics

→ alleged sexual network

→ possible blackmail environment

→ Orlandi hypothesis.

But these branches must remain separate unless they converge through stronger material.

The most significant convergence comes from the later testimony concerning **Emanuela in the Vatican Gardens**.

The material records a 2025 account from another Orlandi friend describing a Vatican Gardens encounter involving a **tall, thin, light-eyed prelate** who allegedly made sexualized comments and embraced Emanuela. Photographs of prelates, including Marcinkus, were reportedly shown to the witness.

This produces a separate evidentiary stream:

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN GARDENS

↓

ALLEGED UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION

↓

HIGH PRELATE

and separately:

MINARDI

↓

DE PEDIS

↓

MARCINKUS

↓

ALLEGED SEXUAL NETWORK.

And separately again:

VATICAN DOSSIER

↓

ACTIVITIES CONCERNING EMANUELA

↓

LONDON / MEDICAL / SECURITY / FINANCIAL EXPENDITURES.

The importance of Marcinkus is that he potentially sits at the intersection of all three.

But the material deliberately refuses to claim that the intersection is already proven.

The working possibilities are:

M1 — Marcinkus personally received Emanuela.

M2 — Another Vatican priest/security official received Emanuela and subsequently delivered her to Marcinkus.

M3 — Marcinkus was connected to the network but never physically met Emanuela.

M4 — The allegations concerning Marcinkus are real but unrelated to Emanuela's disappearance.

M2 is particularly important because it solves the identification problem without requiring the clerical-looking man in the Vatican vehicle to have been Marcinkus.

The possibility of an intermediary also fits the broader institutional structure.

A senior Vatican official could remain at the level of:

authorization

money

institutional protection

or

ultimate control

while lower-ranking personnel performed the physical work.

That is exactly why the distinction between **financial power center** and **physical perpetrator** must be preserved.

Marcinkus does not have to be the person who physically transported Emanuela for his alleged involvement, if any, to be significant.

Conversely, the fact that a Vatican-connected person may have physically received Emanuela would not by itself prove that Marcinkus ordered it.

The investigation therefore reaches an important intermediate conclusion:

Marcinkus is the strongest documented financial bridge between the Vatican and the environment surrounding the later Orlandi reconstruction, but his alleged sexual and Orlandi involvement remains a separate evidentiary branch that must be reconstructed from testimony and converging circumstances.

The financial bridge itself is unusually strong.

Marcinkus was at the IOR.

The IOR was deeply involved in the Ambrosiano crisis.

Calvi was central to that crisis.

Roman organized crime intersected with the Ambrosiano environment through Abbruciati.

De Pedis belonged to that criminal environment.

Minardi says she knew Marcinkus through De Pedis.

Minardi alleges she supplied women to Marcinkus.

Minardi also places Emanuela in a transfer toward a Vatican-connected man.

The Vatican dossier independently indicates prolonged Vatican activity concerning Emanuela, including financial expenditures and foreign operations.

The resulting hypothesis is therefore much stronger than a simple coincidence of names.

It is:

VATICAN FINANCIAL POWER

↓

MARCINKUS / IOR

↓

AMBROSIANO / CALVI

↓

ROMAN CRIMINAL ENVIRONMENT

↓

DE PEDIS

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN-CONNECTED TRANSFER

↓

POSSIBLE SEXUAL-EXPLOITATION ENVIRONMENT

This is the bridge that carries the book from **Vatican money** into **Emanuela Orlandi**.

But there is an important limit.

The financial history does not prove the sexual history.

The sexual allegations do not prove the kidnapping.

The kidnapping allegations do not prove Marcinkus's command.

The Vatican dossier does not itself name Marcinkus as the person who ordered Emanuela's removal.

And the later Garden testimony does not establish that the prelate was Marcinkus.

Each link must therefore retain its own status.

That is not a weakness in the reconstruction.

It is what allows the reconstruction to be tested.

The Marcinkus chapter therefore establishes three distinct layers.

Layer One — The documented Marcinkus

IOR chief

Vatican financial power

Banco Ambrosiano

Calvi

Pazienza

financial crisis

$242 million settlement

criminal investigation.

Layer Two — The alleged Marcinkus

women allegedly supplied by Minardi

alleged sexual exploitation

De Pedis relationship

alleged blackmail environment.

Layer Three — The Orlandi Marcinkus hypothesis

De Pedis

↓

Emanuela

↓

Vatican-plated vehicle

↓

clerical-looking man

↓

possible Marcinkus / intermediary

↓

possible Vatican-linked custody / exploitation.

The three layers overlap around one person.

That is why Marcinkus belongs here.

He is the **financial power center** whose documented position provides the historical bridge into the most controversial branch of the Orlandi reconstruction.

The final question is therefore not whether Marcinkus was important.

He unquestionably was.

The question is **what his importance meant for Emanuela**.

Our material does not permit a final answer.

But it provides a coherent chain of investigation:

Marcinkus

→ documented Vatican financial power

→ documented Ambrosiano connection

→ documented intersection between Ambrosiano and Roman criminal figures

→ alleged relationship with De Pedis

→ alleged sexual network involving women

→ testimony concerning Emanuela's transfer to a Vatican-connected man

→ separate allegation of sexual attention toward Emanuela by a high prelate

→ Vatican expenditure dossier concerning Emanuela

→ possible prolonged Vatican-linked custody.

That chain is not a proven organizational chart.

It is the **Marcinkus bridge**.

And that bridge is what allows the financial history of the Vatican to enter the central reconstruction of what may have happened to Emanuela Orlandi.

Emanuela Orlandi: The Vatican Girl

Emanuela Orlandi was fifteen years old when she disappeared on **22 June 1983**. She was not an anonymous Roman teenager: she was a **Vatican citizen**, the daughter of a papal household employee, and a girl whose family lived inside Vatican City itself. She attended the **Tommaso Ludovico da Victoria music school**, and on the afternoon of her disappearance she was engaged in the ordinary activities of a fifteen-year-old student. Within hours, however, an apparently ordinary afternoon had become the beginning of one of the most extraordinary disappearances in modern Italian history.

The starting point for our reconstruction must therefore be **Emanuela herself**, before the political theories, the Vatican scandals, the Mafia connections, the London trail and the competing explanations that accumulated around her disappearance. She was a young girl living in an extraordinary environment without necessarily knowing how extraordinary it was. Her father worked within the papal household, her family lived in Vatican City, and her daily life brought her into contact with the Catholic world at its institutional center. That Vatican connection would later become one of the defining features of the case.

The circumstances immediately preceding her disappearance contain an important detail for our reconstruction: the **Avon job proposal**. Emanuela had reportedly been told about an opportunity to distribute cosmetics or

promotional material at a fashion event, for which she would receive approximately **375,000 lire**. For a fifteen-year-old girl, the amount was unusually attractive for what appeared to be a short promotional job.

There is no basis in the material for simply declaring that the Avon proposal was a trafficking operation. But within the sexual-exploitation hypothesis developed in our investigation, the proposal cannot be ignored. A respectable commercial opportunity, involving money and an apparently ordinary activity, could provide a convenient way of persuading a teenage girl to leave her normal routine and meet someone she did not know well. The important point is therefore not that the Avon proposal proves anything by itself, but that it provides a **possible recruitment mechanism** immediately before Emanuela disappeared.

The sequence deserves to be kept in its simplest form:

Emanuela, 15 years old

↓

music student

↓

proposed Avon promotional work

↓

attractive payment

↓

contact with people outside her ordinary routine

↓

disappearance on 22 June 1983

The coincidence is striking enough to form the first element of our reconstruction.

The significance becomes greater because the material also contains indications that Emanuela may have attracted attention **before the day she disappeared**. A 2025 investigation reported testimony from Angelo Rotatori, a friend from Emanuela's parish group, concerning events and observations preceding the disappearance. The material therefore does not require us to imagine that the kidnapping began suddenly at the exact moment she vanished. There are indications that the possibility of people taking an interest in Emanuela existed beforehand.

This becomes particularly important when combined with the later account concerning the **Vatican Gardens**.

According to testimony described in the material, another friend of Emanuela recalled an encounter in the Vatican Gardens involving a **tall, thin, light-eyed prelate** who allegedly made sexualized comments toward Emanuela and embraced her. Photographs of prelates, including **Paul Marcinkus**, were reportedly shown to the witness.

This testimony is not the same thing as proof that Marcinkus was the man encountered by Emanuela.

But its importance for this investigation is obvious.

Before the disappearance, there is an account placing Emanuela in a Vatican environment where a high-ranking ecclesiastical figure allegedly displayed sexualized interest in her.

Then comes the proposed Avon opportunity.

Then Emanuela disappears.

Then the later Minardi testimony places her inside a criminal environment associated with **Enrico "Renatino" De Pedis**.

And finally that account describes her being transferred toward a **Vatican-connected man**.

The developing sequence is therefore:

VATICAN GARDENS

↓

alleged sexualized interest in Emanuela

↓

AVON CONTACT

↓

DISAPPEARANCE

↓

DE PEDIS-ASSOCIATED CUSTODY

↓

VATICAN-PLATED VEHICLE

↓

APPARENTLY CLERICAL MAN

This is the point at which the disappearance begins to look fundamentally different from an unexplained missing-person case.

The material's sexual-exploitation investigation therefore approaches Emanuela from the beginning as a potential **victim of a recruitment-and-transfer process**, rather than beginning with the later political explanations surrounding her disappearance. The central hypothesis developed is that the Avon proposal may have functioned as the initial lure, that the De Pedis criminal environment may have been involved in acquiring or holding her, and that the subsequent transfer may have brought her into a Vatican-connected environment.

The most important witness in this reconstruction is **Sabrina Minardi**, the former partner of De Pedis.

Her testimony describes a sequence in which she was asked by De Pedis to collect a girl, encountered a girl she identified as Emanuela, transported her from the Gianicolo area, and eventually brought her toward a Vatican-associated location. She described the recipient as a man who appeared to be a priest and arrived in a **Vatican-plated Mercedes**.

This testimony is central because it potentially answers the first question that otherwise remains extraordinarily difficult:

Who physically took Emanuela?

The working conclusion developed in our investigation is that the **De Pedis/Banda-associated criminal environment** provides the most coherent explanation for the acquisition stage. In other words, the kidnapping itself may have been carried out or organized through De Pedis's criminal network, while the subsequent custody and destination belonged to another layer of the operation.

That produces an important distinction.

The person who physically takes a victim does not necessarily have to be the person who ultimately wants the victim.

A criminal intermediary can acquire someone for another party.

A driver can transport someone without knowing the full purpose.

A priest can receive someone without being the person who ordered the original abduction.

A senior figure can remain behind the intermediary structure.

This is precisely why the investigation does not stop with De Pedis.

The De Pedis connection may explain the **acquisition**.

It does not necessarily explain the **destination**.

And the destination is where the Vatican connection becomes central.

Minardi's account places Emanuela in a location associated with De Pedis's circle and subsequently describes her being transferred to a man who appeared to be a priest. The vehicle was reportedly fitted with **Vatican plates**.

That gives us:

DE PEDIS NETWORK

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN-PLATED MERCEDES

↓

APPARENTLY CLERICAL RECIPIENT

The identity of that recipient remains one of the most important questions in the reconstruction.

One possibility developed in our material is **Paul Marcinkus**.

The reason is not simply that Marcinkus was a Vatican official. Minardi separately claimed familiarity with him and alleged that she had supplied women to him through her relationship with De Pedis. The material also establishes Marcinkus as a major Vatican financial figure through his position at the IOR and his relationship with the Banco Ambrosiano environment.

That creates an unusual convergence:

MINARDI

↔ **DE PEDIS**

↔ **MARCINKUS**

and separately:

EMANUELA

↔ **DE PEDIS**

↔ **VATICAN-PLATED VEHICLE**

↔ **APPARENTLY CLERICAL MAN**.

The conclusion cannot simply be that the priest was Marcinkus.

There is a genuine identification problem.

If Minardi knew Marcinkus personally, one might expect her to recognize him immediately. But the material also records the possibility that she saw the

man only briefly, that circumstances prevented close observation, or that she learned his identity afterward through De Pedis. Contemporary accounts reportedly described her as subsequently identifying the high prelate as Marcinkus.

The more useful conclusion is therefore that **Marcinkus remains a possible identification, but an intermediary hypothesis may be even more structurally convincing**.

Under that hypothesis:

DE PEDIS NETWORK

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN-PLATED VEHICLE

↓

INTERMEDIARY PRIEST / OFFICIAL

↓

MARCINKUS OR ANOTHER SENIOR VATICAN FIGURE

This would explain how a powerful Vatican figure could be connected to Emanuela without personally appearing at the moment of transfer.

At this stage, however, the most important point is not the precise identity of the priest.

It is the **direction of movement**.

The material presents a girl who disappears after an unusual employment proposal, is subsequently described by Minardi as being in a De Pedis-associated environment, and is then allegedly transferred in a Vatican-plated vehicle to an apparently clerical man. That sequence, if accepted as a coherent reconstruction, moves Emanuela from a possible recruitment mechanism through **organized crime and into a Vatican-connected environment**.

The next extraordinary element is the **Vatican expenditure dossier**.

The material describes a purported document entitled, in substance:

"Summary statement of expenses incurred by the Vatican City State for activities relating to citizen Emanuela Orlandi."

The wording is important.

The document is not presented merely as an ordinary police investigation account. Its own title identifies the activities as relating to **Emanuela Orlandi**, and its opening language concerns activities following her removal from her home. The material therefore treats the dossier as potentially documenting a prolonged Vatican operation associated with Emanuela.

The alleged expenses cover an extraordinary period—from the disappearance in **1983 through 1997**.

Among the entries are:

London accommodation

food

transfers

medical expenditure

gynecological expenditure

Camillo Cibin's London travel

investigative operations

press management

depistaggio-related activity

Casaroli

Poletti

and finally a **transfer to Vatican City with related final formalities in 1997**.

If genuine, this changes the central question.

The question would no longer simply be:

What happened to Emanuela immediately after she disappeared?

It would become:

Was Emanuela maintained somewhere under Vatican-connected control for years after her disappearance?

That possibility is directly relevant to the sexual-exploitation reconstruction.

The alleged chronology becomes:

1983

Emanuela disappears.

↓

De Pedis-associated custody

↓

Vatican-connected transfer

↓

possible prolonged custody

↓

London accommodation

↓

medical / gynecological expenditure

↓

further accommodation and transfers

↓

1997 transfer toward Vatican City.

The gynecological expenditure is particularly disturbing within this hypothesis.

The material does not establish that every medical expense was personally incurred by Emanuela. Some expenses clearly concern the wider operation surrounding her. But the dossier's combination of **female accommodation, medical treatment and gynecological expenditure** creates an important convergence with the possibility that a female person was being maintained under Vatican-connected control for an extended period.

Within our sexual-exploitation theory, repeated sexual abuse could logically produce a need for medical treatment, gynecological care, pregnancy-related treatment, treatment for injuries or other reproductive-health consequences.

That does not prove that this is what the expenditure represented.

But it gives the expenditure a very different significance from an ordinary investigative expense.

The material also identifies **Camillo Cibin**, the senior Vatican security official, as another major bridge.

The alleged dossier records expenses connected with his transfers and stays in London during **1985–1988**. Cibin was not an ordinary employee. He was the head of Vatican security. If a document genuinely linking expenses to Emanuela also records repeated London activity involving the head of Vatican security, the London branch becomes substantially more significant.

The resulting chain is:

EMANUELA

↕

VATICAN EXPENDITURE

↕

LONDON

↕

CIBIN

↕

VATICAN SECURITY APPARATUS.

The London component is strengthened by another strand in the material: the existence of Catholic women's accommodation at **176 Clapham Road**, associated with the Scalabrinian congregation. The alleged expenditure records London accommodation at this location, while separate reporting identified the property as a Catholic female hostel for Italian students.

Another London institution, **St Marcellina**, also enters the reconstruction through later expenditure and accommodation references.

The significance of these institutions is not that their existence proves Emanuela was there.

It is that they provide a **concealment environment compatible with the hypothesis**.

A missing adolescent could potentially disappear into an institution in which she was given another name, separated from her family and surrounded by people who assumed she belonged there. The material specifically develops the mechanism:

new name

↓

religious / social isolation

↓

restricted correspondence

↓

institutional control of information

↓

family unable to contact her

↓

outside investigators unable to identify her.

This becomes especially interesting because the material identifies Catholic institutions whose historical functions included accommodation and assistance to vulnerable young women. The **Ancelle dell'Immacolata di Parma**, for example, historically worked with abandoned girls, vulnerable young women, former prisoners and girls considered at risk. The appearance of the congregation in the alleged expenditure material therefore deserves attention within the larger institutional hypothesis.

Again, this does not establish that Emanuela was housed there.

It establishes something different:

the type of institution described in the financial material was capable of accommodating precisely the category of vulnerable female person that our hypothesis concerns.

The London hypothesis therefore becomes a second major branch of the reconstruction.

Branch A — Acquisition

Emanuela

↓

Avon opportunity

↓

De Pedis network

↓

Minardi

↓

Vatican-plated vehicle

↓

unidentified clerical man

↓

possible Marcinkus / Vatican intermediary

Branch B — Long-term concealment

Emanuela?

↓

Vatican-linked custody

↓

London

↓

Catholic female accommodation

↓

possible false identity

↓

medical / gynecological care

↓

later transfers

↓

possible return toward Vatican City.

These two branches potentially meet.

If the Minardi testimony is substantially correct, the first branch explains **how Emanuela entered the system**.

If the expenditure dossier is genuine and concerns her post-disappearance activities, the second branch potentially explains **what happened after the transfer**.

And the Vatican Gardens testimony provides a possible indication of **interest in Emanuela before the disappearance**.

That gives the developing reconstruction a three-stage structure:

BEFORE

Vatican Gardens / possible sexualized interest

↓

ACQUISITION

Avon proposal → disappearance → De Pedis network

↓

TRANSFER

Vatican-plated vehicle → clerical recipient

↓

CUSTODY

possible Vatican-connected exploitation / confinement

↓

LONDON

possible institutional concealment

↓

LATER YEARS

medical expenses / accommodation / transfers

↓

1997

possible return toward Vatican City.

This is the point at which Emanuela becomes connected to the broader sexual-abuse investigation.

She is no longer simply an unexplained disappearance placed beside unrelated Vatican scandals.

The hypothesis developed in the material is that **Emanuela may have been a victim of a Vatican-connected sexual-exploitation system**, acquired through criminal intermediaries and subsequently transferred into an environment controlled or protected by Vatican-connected actors.

The material even develops a broader hybrid hypothesis in which the original sexual crime may subsequently have become entangled with political and financial manipulation. Under that model, Emanuela could have been sexually targeted or exploited first; criminal intermediaries could then have become involved; and the disappearance could subsequently have been used by other actors for political purposes.

But for this book, the important point is that **the sexual-exploitation hypothesis comes first**.

The political and financial theories belong to the surrounding history, but they do not need to explain the entire disappearance in order for the sexual hypothesis to be meaningful.

The material gives us enough elements to construct a specific theory:

Emanuela

→ possible sexual interest before disappearance

→ possible deceptive recruitment through Avon

→ De Pedis-associated acquisition

→ confinement

→ Vatican-plated transfer

→ apparently clerical recipient

→ possible Vatican-connected custody

→ possible long-term concealment

→ London Catholic institutions

→ gynecological / medical expenditure

→ eventual transfer toward Vatican City.

The strongest part of the reconstruction is the connection between **Minardi's account and the physical world she described**. She did not merely offer an abstract story about Emanuela being held somewhere. She supplied a location associated with the De Pedis environment, and investigators subsequently found a concealed subterranean room/corridor system and bathroom at the location she identified. The material treats this as a significant corroborative element in her testimony.

This matters because Minardi's credibility cannot reasonably be reduced to the simplistic proposition that she had problems with drugs or alcohol and therefore everything she remembered must be false.

Her testimony contains contradictions.

It also contains details capable of being checked against physical circumstances.

Those two things can exist simultaneously.

The correct conclusion is therefore that Minardi is a **high-value but imperfect witness** whose individual statements have to be considered according to their correspondence with other elements of the reconstruction.

This is particularly important for the alleged transfer to the priest.

If the location associated with her account corresponds to a real concealed space, and if the transfer to a Vatican-plated vehicle is part of the same testimony, then the Vatican recipient becomes more than an abstract character.

He becomes the missing link between:

Roman criminal custody

and

Vatican-connected custody.

Whoever that man was is therefore one of the most important unidentified figures in the entire case.

He could have been Marcinkus.

He could have been a middleman acting for Marcinkus.

He could have been another Vatican priest.

He could have been a security official.

The material does not finally resolve his identity.

But the direction of the transfer is the central fact of our reconstruction.

Emanuela does not simply disappear into an unknown void.

In Minardi's account, she moves from **De Pedis-associated custody toward a Vatican-connected person**.

That is the bridge.

The alleged Vatican expenditure dossier then provides a possible second bridge, from the immediate aftermath of the disappearance to a **long-term Vatican-connected operation**.

This is why the dossier is so important despite its disputed authenticity.

That means we should neither dismiss it as false nor silently promote every line to established fact.

The document's title explicitly connects its expenditure to activities relating to Emanuela.

Its individual entries, however, include both **personal/custodial-looking expenditure** and **operational/investigative expenditure**.

That distinction actually makes the document more interesting.

If it were simply an investigation account, the London accommodation and gynecological entries would require explanation.

If it were simply a personal-maintenance account, the major investigative expenditures, press management and Casaroli-related entries would require explanation.

The combined interpretation is more coherent:

a consolidated financial account of the operation surrounding Emanuela.

Under that interpretation:

PERSONAL / CUSTODY

→ accommodation

→ food

→ medical

→ gynecology

→ transfers

→ health.

And:

OPERATIONAL

→ investigations

→ foreign operations

→ tapes

→ phonographic analysis

→ press management

→ depistaggio

→ Casaroli

→ Poletti.

That is potentially the most consequential document in the entire Orlandi reconstruction.

Because if it is genuine, it suggests not a short-lived response to a kidnapping but a **fourteen-year institutional operation**.

The financial scale is also substantial.

The material calculates approximately **482.4 million lire** in visible expenditure, equivalent to roughly **$368,000 in contemporary nominal U.S. dollars**, with approximately **226 million lire**, or around **$172,000**, consisting of expenses that plausibly appear personal or custodial—accommodation, medical care, transfers and final relocation—before additional ambiguous expenses and reimbursements are considered.

The two largest accommodation-related categories are especially important:

100 million lire, 1988–93

and

70 million lire, 1993–97.

Those sums suggest continuity rather than a single short-term intervention.

If those expenses really relate to the continued maintenance of a woman under Vatican-connected control, the implication is enormous.

It would mean that the disappearance of a fifteen-year-old Vatican citizen did not end with her removal.

It would mean that someone was potentially **maintained, transported, medically treated and concealed for years**.

And within our sexual-exploitation hypothesis, it raises the possibility that Emanuela was not merely kidnapped and hidden.

She may have been **sexually exploited over an extended period**.

The material does not establish that conclusion as a documented fact.

But the logic of the hypothesis is straightforward.

A young girl is targeted.

She is acquired through intermediaries.

She is confined.

She is transferred to a Vatican-connected person.

She disappears from public life.

A Vatican-linked expenditure account subsequently records female accommodation, medical and gynecological expenses over many years.

London Catholic institutions appear in the financial trail.

Security personnel appear.

Transfers occur.

Eventually, there is an alleged transfer back toward Vatican City.

The hypothesis that emerges is therefore not arbitrary.

It is an attempt to explain **all these elements with one continuous story**.

That is the central purpose of this book's Orlandi section.

Not to repeat every theory ever proposed about Emanuela.

Not to reproduce the Cold War narrative.

Not to make the financial theory explain everything.

But to ask whether the apparently separate pieces become coherent when Emanuela is examined as a possible **victim of Vatican-connected sexual exploitation**.

The answer developed in our material is that they can.

The emerging reconstruction is:

BEFORE THE DISAPPEARANCE

Emanuela is fifteen.

She lives in Vatican City.

Her father works in the papal household.

She attends music school.

She is allegedly approached through an attractive Avon opportunity.

There is also a later-reported account of sexualized interest from a high-ranking prelate in the Vatican Gardens.

↓

22 JUNE 1983

Emanuela disappears.

↓

FIRST CUSTODY

According to Minardi, De Pedis's criminal environment acquires or holds her.

↓

CONFINEMENT

She is allegedly kept in a De Pedis-associated location.

↓

TRANSFER

She is moved in a Vatican-plated vehicle.

↓

VATICAN CONNECTION

She is delivered to a man who appears to be a priest.

↓

POSSIBLE SENIOR RECIPIENT

The man may have been Marcinkus or an intermediary working for him or another Vatican figure.

↓

LONG-TERM CUSTODY

The alleged expenditure dossier records accommodation, food, medical and gynecological expenses over subsequent years.

↓

LONDON

Catholic female institutions and accommodation enter the trail.

↓

SECURITY

Camillo Cibin appears in connection with London activity.

↓

1997

The alleged dossier records a final transfer toward Vatican City.

This is the **Emanuela Orlandi reconstruction** that will govern the following pages.

It begins not with the question of what political group kidnapped her, but with the question of **what happened to a fifteen-year-old girl after she was approached, disappeared, and allegedly entered the custody of people connected to the Roman criminal and Vatican worlds**.

The Avon proposal is therefore the possible **doorway**.

De Pedis is the possible **acquisition mechanism**.

Minardi is the principal **witness to the transition**.

The Vatican-plated car is the possible **physical bridge**.

The unidentified priest is the possible **Vatican gateway**.

Marcinkus is a possible **senior connection**.

The expenditure dossier is the possible **long-term institutional trail**.

London is the possible **concealment environment**.

And the gynecological and medical expenditure is one of the most disturbing elements supporting the possibility of **prolonged sexual exploitation**.

The disappearance of Emanuela Orlandi therefore becomes, in this reconstruction, not the beginning of a mystery without structure, but the beginning of a chain:

RECRUITMENT → ABDUCTION → CRIMINAL CUSTODY → VATICAN TRANSFER → POSSIBLE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION → LONG-TERM CONCEALMENT → LONDON → POSSIBLE RETURN TO VATICAN CITY.

Whether every link can ultimately be established is a separate question.

But this is the structure that the material assembled in our investigation has produced.

And from this point onward, Emanuela will be treated not merely as **"the Vatican girl who disappeared"**, but as the possible victim at the center of a much darker institutional reconstruction: **a fifteen-year-old girl whose disappearance may have begun with a deceptive opportunity, passed through the hands of a Roman criminal network, and ultimately entered a Vatican-connected system of custody, sexual exploitation and concealment.**

The First Hours and the Recruitment Theory

The first hours of Emanuela Orlandi's disappearance become particularly important when the case is approached as a possible sexual-exploitation operation rather than simply as an unexplained kidnapping. The material assembled in our investigation does not establish that the people who approached Emanuela were traffickers, nor does it establish independently that the Avon proposal was a deliberate lure. What it does establish is that immediately before her disappearance, a fifteen-year-old girl was presented with an apparently respectable opportunity involving an unusually attractive payment, and that this opportunity deserves to be examined as a possible mechanism through which someone could have obtained access to her.

Emanuela was fifteen years old, lived in Vatican City, attended the Tommaso Ludovico da Victoria music school, and disappeared on 22 June 1983. Her age is important because the recruitment theory does not depend upon imagining a sophisticated adult criminal transaction. A teenager could potentially be persuaded to meet someone through an invitation that appeared completely ordinary: a temporary job, a fashion event, an opportunity to earn money, or an introduction made through someone she trusted.

The material records that Emanuela's sister was told that Emanuela had received an offer connected with **Avon**, involving the distribution of cosmetics or promotional material at a fashion event, for approximately **375,000 lire**.

For a fifteen-year-old girl and a short promotional activity, the amount was unusually attractive.

The significance of the offer lies precisely in its apparent normality.

There was nothing inherently suspicious about a teenager being interested in earning money.

There was nothing inherently suspicious about promotional work.

There was nothing inherently suspicious about a fashion event.

And there was nothing inherently suspicious about Avon as a commercial company.

The investigative question is narrower:

Was the apparently legitimate opportunity actually being used by somebody as a means of getting Emanuela to meet an intermediary?

That is the question that turns the Avon story from an incidental detail into a possible recruitment lead.

A recruitment mechanism does not necessarily have to look like a kidnapping.

It can begin with an invitation.

It can begin with money.

It can begin with an apparently harmless appointment.

It can begin with a person offering an opportunity to someone who has no reason to suspect danger.

The proposed sequence is therefore:

TEENAGE GIRL

↓

APPARENTLY LEGITIMATE OPPORTUNITY

↓

ATTRACTIVE PAYMENT

↓

MEETING / APPOINTMENT

↓

ISOLATION FROM NORMAL ROUTINE

↓

CONTACT WITH INTERMEDIARY

↓

DISAPPEARANCE

This is a model of recruitment, not a statement that this is exactly what happened to Emanuela.

The distinction is essential.

The material explicitly identifies the Avon proposal as a **possible recruitment mechanism**, while stating that it cannot be called independently proven trafficking evidence.

That limitation should remain at the center of the reconstruction.

We do not possess, in the material assembled here, an independent document proving that Avon itself was involved.

We do not possess proof that the fashion event was fabricated.

We do not possess proof identifying the person who allegedly made the offer as a member of a criminal organization.

We do not possess proof that the proposed job was designed specifically to abduct Emanuela.

Those are the missing links.

But the fact that those links remain missing does not make the lead irrelevant.

It makes it a **recruitment hypothesis requiring interpretation alongside the other evidence**.

The timing is what makes it significant.

The job proposal appears immediately before the disappearance.

Emanuela was young.

The payment was unusually attractive.

She left the music-school environment.

She disappeared.

And the subsequent reconstruction developed in our investigation places her in circumstances involving the De Pedis criminal environment.

The material therefore identifies the Avon offer as one of the five pillars of the sexual-exploitation hypothesis:

Pillar 1 — Targeting

Emanuela may have been followed before her disappearance.

Pillar 2 — Sexual approach

A reported unwanted advance by a person close to the Pope in the Vatican Gardens.

Pillar 3 — Recruitment opportunity

The Avon/fashion-event proposal immediately before the disappearance.

Pillar 4 — Transportation and confinement

Minardi's account concerning Emanuela's movement and the specific confinement location.

Pillar 5 — Existing sexual network

Minardi's allegations concerning women supplied to Marcinkus and her claimed connection between Marcinkus and De Pedis.

These five pillars are not five proven facts of one criminal operation.

They are five separate observations that, taken together, create the central hypothesis that our investigation is examining.

The recruitment theory becomes stronger if Emanuela was already being watched.

The material includes a later account from **Angelo Rotatori**, a friend from Emanuela's parish group, concerning events and observations before 22 June. This raises the possibility that attention toward Emanuela may have preceded the disappearance itself.

If that earlier attention can be established, the Avon proposal takes on a different significance.

A girl who had merely received an unusual job offer is one thing.

A girl who had allegedly been observed or followed, subsequently received an unusual job proposal, and then disappeared is another.

The second sequence suggests the possibility of **targeting followed by recruitment**.

The model becomes:

OBSERVATION

↓

TARGET SELECTION

↓

APPROACH

↓

JOB OFFER

↓

MEETING

↓

ABDUCTION / TRANSFER

This is why the investigation began asking who actually made the Avon offer.

The identity of that person is potentially decisive.

Was it someone Emanuela already knew?

Was it someone introduced by a friend?

Was it someone connected to the music school?

Was it someone connected to the fashion event?

Was the event itself genuine?

Did other girls receive similar offers?

Was the payment actually promised?

Was there a real commercial arrangement?

Did anyone expect Emanuela to travel somewhere other than the place she had been told?

These questions were identified in the material as the key unresolved elements of the recruitment theory.

The music school itself therefore becomes relevant.

Emanuela attended the school in the **Sant'Apollinare complex**, and our material records that the building was owned by **APSA**, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, with Monsignor **Marcel Noirot** among the school's teachers or management. The significance for the present investigation is not that the school was itself an abuse institution. There is no basis for making that accusation. Its significance is that a location frequented by teenage girls potentially provided the basic conditions that any recruitment operation would require: **access, trust, opportunity and proximity**.

The distinction matters.

A school is not suspicious simply because children attend it.

A priest or teacher is not suspicious simply because he has access to students.

The investigation is concerned with whether any particular person used legitimate institutional access for an illegitimate purpose.

The same principle applies to the Avon offer.

The existence of the offer does not prove a criminal operation.

The question is what happened **through** the offer.

This becomes especially important because the material's central reconstruction no longer treats the disappearance as beginning with the later telephone calls demanding attention from the Vatican.

The starting point is earlier:

Who selected Emanuela?

Who watched her?

Who approached her?

Who offered the job?

Who arranged the meeting?

Who physically took her?

Where was she first held?

The investigation described this as reconstructing an entire **alleged exploitation chain**, rather than merely asking who kidnapped her.

The sequence is:

Recruitment

↓

Who selected her?

Surveillance

↓

Who watched her?

Approach

↓

Who approached her?

Bait

↓

Who offered the Avon job?

Abduction

↓

Who physically took her?

First custody

↓

Where was she held?

Intermediary

↓

Who controlled her?

Transfer

↓

Who moved her?

Vatican interface

↓

Who was the clerical/Vatican person?

Sexual exploitation

↓

Who allegedly abused her?

Second custody

↓

Where was she subsequently held?

Disposal / transfer

↓

Was she killed, hidden, moved abroad or otherwise concealed?

Cover-up

↓

Who knew afterward?

This is a fundamentally different way of looking at the case.

The traditional question—

"Who kidnapped Emanuela?"

—is only one part of the problem.

If the sexual-exploitation hypothesis is correct, the kidnapping would represent the transition between recruitment and exploitation.

The person who offered the opportunity might not have been the person who physically abducted her.

The person who abducted her might not have been the person who ultimately controlled her.

The person who received her after the kidnapping might not have been the person who sexually exploited her.

And the person who later concealed her might not have been involved in the original crime.

That is why the investigation separates the different stages.

The Avon proposal belongs to the **recruitment layer**.

The De Pedis environment belongs to the **acquisition and first-custody layer**.

The Vatican-plated vehicle belongs to the **transfer layer**.

The unidentified clerical person belongs to the **Vatican-interface layer**.

The later London material belongs to the **possible long-term custody and concealment layer**.

The sexual-exploitation hypothesis attempts to connect those stages without pretending that every connection has already been proved.

This is also why the apparently respectable nature of the offer is significant.

A trafficking operation does not necessarily announce itself as trafficking.

A young woman might be approached through:

employment

friendship

religious trust

social opportunity

financial opportunity

or

a supposedly legitimate appointment.

The material's concern is therefore not that the Avon offer was inherently sinister.

It is that the offer may have supplied the exact kind of **socially acceptable reason for contact** that could make a teenager leave her normal routine without becoming immediately suspicious.

The amount—375,000 lire—adds another element.

For a teenager, money can be persuasive.

It can make an unusual invitation seem worthwhile.

It can overcome hesitation.

And it can create the impression that an adult opportunity is being offered rather than that someone is attempting to isolate the girl.

Again, this is the mechanism under investigation, not proof of intent.

The next step is therefore to place the Avon proposal against what happened afterward.

According to the reconstruction developed from the material, Emanuela was subsequently placed in circumstances associated with **Enrico "Renatino" De Pedis** and his criminal environment. That is where the recruitment theory potentially becomes a kidnapping theory.

The sequence becomes:

AVON OFFER

↓

Emanuela leaves normal routine

↓

DISAPPEARANCE

↓

DE PEDIS-ASSOCIATED CUSTODY

↓

VATICAN-CONNECTED TRANSFER

This is much more significant than the Avon offer alone.

If the offer was innocent, the coincidence may be exactly that: a coincidence.

If the offer was a lure, it becomes the first identifiable mechanism in the disappearance.

The distinction can only be resolved by determining who made the offer and what happened around the supposed event.

Until then, the material supports a measured conclusion:

The Avon proposal is not independently proven evidence of trafficking, but its timing, the age of Emanuela, the unusually attractive payment and the subsequent disappearance make it a significant potential

recruitment mechanism within the broader sexual-exploitation reconstruction.

That conclusion is deliberately narrower than saying:

"Avon was involved."

We have not established that.

It is also narrower than saying:

"The job offer proves Emanuela was trafficked."

It does not.

The finding is instead:

someone presented a fifteen-year-old girl with an unusual opportunity immediately before she disappeared, and the identity and purpose of that approach remain important to understanding how she may have been brought into the circumstances that followed.

That is the first step in reconstructing the acquisition of Emanuela.

The next step is the person who, according to the central witness in this branch, actually connects her disappearance to the Roman criminal world.

That person is **Enrico "Renatino" De Pedis**.

De Pedis, Minardi and the Roman Criminal Environment

The recruitment theory becomes substantially more concrete when the investigation reaches **Enrico "Renatino" De Pedis** and **Sabrina Minardi**. De Pedis was a senior figure in the **Banda della Magliana**, Rome's notorious criminal organization, and Minardi was his former partner. Her testimony is the principal witness account connecting Emanuela's disappearance to De Pedis's environment and, from there, to the alleged Vatican-connected transfer that lies at the center of our sexual-exploitation reconstruction.

This is the point at which the case changes character.

The Avon proposal provides a possible **recruitment mechanism**.

Minardi's testimony provides a possible **acquisition and custody mechanism**.

According to the reconstruction preserved in our material, Emanuela was allegedly taken into a De Pedis-associated environment after her disappearance and held there before being transferred onward. If this account is substantially correct, the question of who physically organized the kidnapping becomes much more specific than the general mystery surrounding Emanuela's disappearance.

The working reconstruction developed is that the **De Pedis/Banda della Magliana environment may have organized or carried out the kidnapping**, potentially following the recruitment approach represented by the Avon offer. The material describes this as the central working hypothesis rather than as a judicially established fact.

The distinction is important because the evidence concerning De Pedis is not based upon the mere fact that he was a criminal.

Being a member of the Banda della Magliana does not prove participation in every crime attributed to the organization.

Nor does a connection to De Pedis prove participation in Emanuela's disappearance.

The relevant evidence is the **specific testimony concerning Emanuela**.

Minardi's account describes Emanuela being taken to a location associated with De Pedis's circle. She gave investigators a particular location, and the material records that investigators subsequently found an unusual **subterranean space** there. The physical findings were considered significant because the layout reportedly corresponded in important respects with Minardi's description.

This is one of the most important reasons the investigation did not simply discard Minardi's testimony.

Her credibility has serious problems.

But the testimony also contains details capable of being checked against the physical world.

That produces a more complicated picture than either:

"Minardi was telling the truth about everything."

or:

"Minardi was unreliable, therefore everything she said is worthless."

The material adopts a third position:

her testimony must be broken into individual propositions and tested separately.

For example:

She knew De Pedis — established.

She knew people in his criminal environment — strongly supported.

She knew Marcinkus — alleged / potentially corroborable.

She supplied women to Marcinkus — allegation requiring corroboration.

De Pedis knew Marcinkus — important allegation.

Emanuela was transported in the circumstances she described — unresolved.

A Vatican vehicle was involved — unresolved.

A Vatican priest received Emanuela — unresolved.

Marcinkus ordered the kidnapping — unproven.

Emanuela was killed as Minardi described — unproven and contradicted by chronology.

This classification is crucial to the way this book presents the evidence.

We are not treating Minardi as a perfect witness.

We are also not treating her as irrelevant.

The useful question is:

Which parts of her account survive comparison with independent evidence?

The strongest point concerns the location she identified.

According to the material, investigators found an underground area at the address she described, including a subterranean structure and bathroom. Later reporting stated that the physical layout substantially matched aspects of her description.

That does not prove that Emanuela was imprisoned there.

The material explicitly distinguishes:

The physical location existed and contained features corresponding to aspects of Minardi's account

from:

The physical findings prove that Emanuela was imprisoned there.

The second proposition remains unproven.

This distinction is especially important because the underground location has sometimes been transformed into something much more definitive than the evidence permits.

The material specifically warns against describing visible metal fixtures or chain-like objects as proven "torture restraints" without forensic documentation establishing what they were, when they were installed and whether they were capable of restraining a person. They should instead be described as **metal fixtures or chain-like objects visible in photographs of the subterranean area** unless stronger evidence becomes available.

The location nevertheless matters.

If Minardi independently described a place associated with De Pedis's environment and later investigators found a concealed subterranean space that corresponded to important details of her description, the testimony gains a form of external corroborative value.

It does not become automatically true.

But it becomes harder to dismiss as pure invention.

The next part of her account concerns the movement of Emanuela from the De Pedis environment toward a Vatican-connected person.

This is the critical bridge.

According to the material, Minardi described Emanuela being transported from the De Pedis-associated location and eventually handed over at a **Vatican petrol station** to a man who appeared to be a priest and arrived in a **Vatican-plated Mercedes**.

The sequence is therefore:

DE PEDIS NETWORK

↓

EMANUELA

↓

CONFINEMENT

↓

TRANSPORT

↓

VATICAN PETROL STATION

↓

VATICAN-PLATED MERCEDES

↓

MAN APPEARING TO BE A PRIEST

This is the point where the Roman criminal environment and the Vatican hypothesis potentially meet.

The importance of this account is enormous if it is substantially correct.

The De Pedis environment could explain the **criminal acquisition** of Emanuela.

The Vatican vehicle and clerical recipient could explain the **transition into another sphere of control**.

The two stages do not require the same people.

That distinction is central to the reconstruction.

A criminal network could carry out an abduction.

It could hold the victim temporarily.

It could then transfer the victim to another person.

The recipient could belong to an entirely different institution.

The person receiving her could be an intermediary rather than the ultimate controller.

The person ordering the original kidnapping could therefore be different from the person who physically received Emanuela.

This is why the material describes the Orlandi investigation as a **trafficking-style reconstruction** rather than merely a kidnapping investigation.

The sequence becomes:

RECRUITMENT

↓

ABDUCTION

↓

FIRST CUSTODY

↓

INTERMEDIARY

↓

TRANSFER

↓

VATICAN INTERFACE

↓

POSSIBLE EXPLOITATION

That structure explains why De Pedis is so important without requiring him to explain everything that happened afterward.

He may represent the **first operational layer**.

The Vatican-connected recipient represents the **second layer**.

The later London material potentially represents a **third layer**.

This produces a much more coherent reconstruction than simply asking whether De Pedis kidnapped Emanuela.

The question becomes:

What happened after De Pedis's network had her?

According to Minardi's account, the answer begins with the transfer to the apparently clerical man.

The man's identity is therefore one of the greatest unresolved problems in the case.

The material records several possibilities.

Possibility One — Marcinkus himself

The priest who received Emanuela may have been **Paul Marcinkus**.

Possibility Two — A Vatican intermediary

Another priest or Vatican security official may have physically received Emanuela and subsequently delivered her to Marcinkus or another senior figure.

Possibility Three — Another Vatican-connected person

The man may have belonged to the Vatican environment but had no direct relationship with Marcinkus.

Possibility Four — The Vatican identification is mistaken

The vehicle or person may have been misidentified.

The material particularly emphasizes the **middleman hypothesis**. If Marcinkus was a senior figure, there is no reason to assume that he personally had to perform the physical transfer. A trusted intermediary could have taken custody of Emanuela and delivered her onward.

This becomes even more important because Minardi separately claimed that she knew Marcinkus personally and had been involved in supplying women to him.

If those claims were true, she might reasonably have been expected to recognize him.

But the material does not permit the conclusion that she therefore could not have seen him.

She may have seen the man only briefly.

She may not have examined him closely.

She may have learned his identity later.

Or the man may genuinely have been an intermediary.

Thus the correct conclusion is not:

"The priest definitely was not Marcinkus."

Nor:

"The priest definitely was Marcinkus."

The more useful hypothesis is:

De Pedis network → Emanuela → Vatican intermediary → possible Marcinkus or another senior figure.

That two-level structure is particularly important for the sexual-exploitation theory.

It separates **physical transfer** from **ultimate authority**.

The person who physically receives a victim can be an intermediary.

The person who ultimately controls the victim can remain elsewhere.

This is how an institutional system could theoretically operate without every participant being visible at every stage.

Again, that is a reconstruction of the mechanism, not proof that such a system existed.

The next issue is the relationship between De Pedis and the Vatican.

Here the material contains a significant independent connection through **Danilo Abbruciati**, another Banda della Magliana member.

On **27 April 1982**, Abbruciati attacked **Roberto Rosone**, a Banco Ambrosiano executive, and was killed during the confrontation. Because Banco Ambrosiano was deeply connected to the Vatican financial environment

through the IOR and Marcinkus, the incident provides a documented point at which Roman organized crime and the Vatican financial world intersected.

The chain is:

VATICAN FINANCE

↓

MARCINKUS / IOR

↓

BANCO AMBROSIANO

↕

ROBERTO ROSONE

↓

DANILO ABBRUCIATI

↓

BANDA DELLA MAGLIANA

This does not prove that De Pedis participated in the attack.

It does not prove that the Banda della Magliana kidnapped Emanuela.

It does not prove that the financial relationship produced the kidnapping.

But it demonstrates that the Roman criminal environment and Vatican financial environment were not entirely isolated from one another.

That makes Minardi's alleged De Pedis–Marcinkus relationship more significant than it would be if there were no documented intersection between the two worlds.

The material also records other testimony concerning De Pedis.

Maurizio Abbatino, a former Banda member, associated De Pedis with the Orlandi affair through information attributed to **Claudio Sicilia**.

Antonio Mancini, another former Banda member, described involvement by the Testaccini faction and pressure against the Vatican concerning money.

Fabiola Moretti, who knew De Pedis closely, reportedly said she had heard nothing about his involvement.

Raffaella Carnovale categorically rejected Banda or De Pedis involvement.

These contradictions are important.

They prevent the book from presenting the Banda della Magliana hypothesis as a unanimously confirmed fact.

The evidence instead consists of **competing witness streams**.

Some point toward De Pedis.

Some deny his involvement.

Minardi provides the most elaborate reconstruction connecting De Pedis, Vatican figures and Emanuela.

Her account is also the one containing the most serious chronological and factual difficulties.

The appropriate conclusion is therefore:

Minardi is an investigative lead, not proof.

Yet her account has one feature that makes it especially valuable for the present book.

She does not merely claim that De Pedis knew something about Emanuela.

She describes **a chain of physical custody**.

That chain is what makes her testimony relevant to a sexual-exploitation reconstruction.

Her account potentially provides:

the people

the location

the vehicle

the transfer

the recipient

and

the relationship between the criminal and Vatican environments.

Even if individual details remain uncertain, this is much more specific than a general theory that "the Mafia may have been involved."

The most important part is the transition:

DE PEDIS

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN VEHICLE

↓

APPARENTLY CLERICAL MAN.

That is the moment at which the investigation moves from the Roman criminal world into the Vatican hypothesis.

It is also the moment at which the sexual-exploitation theory becomes substantially darker.

If Emanuela was recruited through a deceptive opportunity, abducted by a criminal intermediary and subsequently delivered to a Vatican-connected person, then the kidnapping may have been only the **first stage** of what happened to her.

The central question becomes:

What happened after the handover?

This is precisely where the material's later evidence becomes relevant, but it must not be imported prematurely into this page.

The De Pedis/Minardi testimony establishes the possible **bridge**.

The later expenditure dossier and London material may provide evidence about what happened after that bridge.

For the present page, the important finding is therefore the first custody stage.

The working reconstruction is:

AVON / POSSIBLE RECRUITMENT

↓

EMANUELA

↓

DE PEDIS / BANDA-ASSOCIATED ACQUISITION

↓

CONFINEMENT

↓

TRANSFER

↓

VATICAN-PLATED VEHICLE

↓

UNIDENTIFIED CLERICAL MAN

This is the point at which the original kidnapping question can be answered more specifically than before.

The working hypothesis of our investigation is that **the De Pedis criminal environment organized or carried out the acquisition of Emanuela**, potentially through the apparently legitimate recruitment opportunity that preceded her disappearance.

But that does not answer the larger question.

It only answers the first part.

Who may have taken her?

Possibly the De Pedis network.

Who may have received her afterward?

Unknown.

Who may have controlled her afterward?

Unknown.

Who may have sexually exploited her?

Unknown.

Where was she subsequently held?

Unknown.

Was she moved abroad?

Possible, but not established at this stage.

Was she alive for years afterward?

Possible within the reconstruction, but not established.

The distinction between these questions is crucial.

The De Pedis stage may therefore be the **solved beginning of an unsolved chain**.

The material itself describes the present working model in this way: Emanuela may have been deliberately selected, sexually targeted before her disappearance, lured through a seemingly legitimate employment opportunity, abducted through a criminal intermediary, held in a De Pedis-associated environment and subsequently transferred to a Vatican-connected man.

That is the reconstruction that carries us forward.

It does not require the claim that every person in the Banda della Magliana participated.

It does not require the claim that Marcinkus personally received Emanuela.

It does not require the claim that the Vatican as an institution ordered the kidnapping as an established fact.

It requires only the narrower working hypothesis that **the criminal acquisition and the alleged Vatican transfer may have been two stages of the same operation**.

That is why De Pedis is the central bridge of this page.

The Avon proposal may represent the **entry point**.

De Pedis represents the **criminal acquisition layer**.

Minardi provides the **witness account**.

The underground location provides the principal **physical corroborative element**.

The Vatican-plated Mercedes provides the alleged **transfer mechanism**.

And the unidentified priest provides the **missing link into the Vatican environment**.

The investigation therefore reaches its first major reconstruction:

Emanuela may not simply have disappeared. She may have been recruited, acquired and transferred through distinct layers of an organized operation.

The first layer was potentially the apparently respectable invitation.

The second was the Roman criminal environment.

The third was the alleged Vatican interface.

What happened beyond that interface is the next part of the story.

The Vatican-Plated Mercedes and the Clerical Man

The most important moment in Sabrina Minardi's reconstruction of Emanuela Orlandi's disappearance is the alleged handover that follows her period of confinement in the De Pedis environment. According to Minardi's testimony, Emanuela was transported from the Roman location where she had been held and brought toward a Vatican-associated place, where she was transferred to a man who appeared to be a priest. The vehicle associated with the handover

was described as a **Mercedes bearing Vatican plates**, making this alleged transfer the critical point at which the criminal environment surrounding De Pedis potentially connects with the Vatican side of the reconstruction.

The importance of this account lies in its specificity.

Minardi did not merely tell investigators that Emanuela had somehow been taken to the Vatican.

Her account described a sequence of physical movements:

Emanuela

↓

De Pedis-associated custody

↓

transport

↓

Vatican-associated location

↓

Vatican-plated Mercedes

↓

man appearing to be a priest

↓

Emanuela taken away.

This is the alleged transition on which the Vatican branch of the reconstruction depends.

Until this point, the story can be understood as a possible criminal kidnapping involving the Roman underworld. After this point, if Minardi's account is correct, the story enters another institutional environment altogether.

That is why the identity of the man matters so much.

Who was he?

Was he a priest?

Was he a Vatican official?

Was he security personnel?

Was he working for a senior Vatican figure?

Was he Marcinkus?

Or was he an intermediary whose task was simply to receive Emanuela and transport her elsewhere?

The material does not provide a definitive answer.

This uncertainty is not a minor technical problem. It determines how the entire Vatican hypothesis should be constructed.

The simplest version would be:

De Pedis

↓

Emanuela

↓

Marcinkus

But this requires the unidentified man in Minardi's account to have been Marcinkus himself.

Our investigation found that this conclusion is too rigid.

The material records two apparently conflicting elements in Minardi's testimony. In the initial account, she described the recipient simply as **a man who seemed to be a priest**. Later reporting records that she identified the high prelate as **Paul Marcinkus**, in some versions because De Pedis told her that this was the man's identity.

At the same time, Minardi separately claimed that she personally knew Marcinkus.

This creates a problem if we assume that the person receiving Emanuela necessarily had to be Marcinkus.

If she knew him well, why did her first description not simply identify him?

There are several possible explanations.

She may have seen the man only briefly.

The circumstances may have been stressful and confusing.

She may not have looked closely enough to recognize him immediately.

He may have appeared differently from previous occasions.

Or she may have learned his identity from De Pedis rather than identifying him independently.

The material therefore rejects the conclusion:

"It definitely was not Marcinkus."

But it also rejects:

"It definitely was Marcinkus."

The evidence permits both possibilities.

This leads to the more useful **middleman hypothesis**.

Under this reconstruction, the man who physically received Emanuela did not have to be the senior person allegedly responsible for what happened to her.

The sequence would be:

DE PEDIS NETWORK

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN-PLATED VEHICLE

↓

INTERMEDIARY PRIEST / OFFICIAL

↓

MARCINKUS OR ANOTHER SENIOR VATICAN FIGURE

This model solves an important structural problem.

Why would the senior Vatican figure himself need to appear at the physical handover?

He would not necessarily need to.

A powerful person could use someone trusted to perform the actual transportation.

The intermediary could have authorized Vatican transport.

He could have received Emanuela.

He could have taken her to another location.

He could have reported back to someone higher in the hierarchy.

The senior figure could therefore remain physically absent while still being connected to the operation.

This is not a claim that such an intermediary existed.

It is the explanation that best accommodates the uncertainty in the testimony.

The material explicitly separates two questions:

Question 1

Who physically received Emanuela?

Possible answer:

an unidentified priest or Vatican intermediary.

Question 2

Who ordered or controlled the transfer?

Possible answers:

Marcinkus, another senior Vatican figure, or another institutional actor.

Those two people do not have to be the same.

This distinction becomes especially important because the broader Vatican material contains several different figures who could theoretically occupy different operational roles.

Marcinkus appears in the financial and alleged sexual-network branch.

Cibin appears in the security and transport branch.

Casaroli appears in connection with the alleged compartmentalized Vatican operation.

Poletti appears in connection with substantial expenditure in the alleged dossier.

Buzzonetti appears in the medical branch.

The material therefore increasingly presents the possibility of a **distributed operation**, rather than a story in which one person performs every function.

The handover is where such a structure would become visible.

A criminal group could perform the acquisition.

A different person could arrange transport.

A Vatican-connected driver could provide the vehicle.

A priest could receive the victim.

A senior official could control or authorize what happened next.

If this occurred, the physical handover would be precisely the point at which the different layers intersected.

This is why the Vatican-plated Mercedes is so important.

The vehicle, if correctly remembered, would not by itself identify the person inside it.

But it would provide a potential institutional marker.

The distinction is:

Vatican plates

≠

proof of Vatican institutional involvement in a kidnapping.

A vehicle with Vatican plates establishes, at most, an alleged connection to Vatican transport.

The crucial questions would then be:

Who was authorized to use the vehicle?

Who was driving?

Who was inside?

Where did the vehicle come from?

Where did it go?

Who received Emanuela?

Was the vehicle officially assigned to a particular office?

Was it a security vehicle?

Was it a personal vehicle?

Could it have been used by an intermediary?

The material does not answer all of these questions.

That is precisely why the vehicle remains a critical but unresolved element.

The alleged handover is nevertheless significant because it follows Minardi's description of Emanuela's earlier confinement.

According to her testimony, she was taken to or near the **Gianicolo area**, transported while apparently confused or disoriented, and eventually transferred to the priest-like man. The same account identified a specific property associated with the subsequent confinement, and investigators later found an underground structure at the location.

This creates continuity within her testimony:

specific location

↓

confinement

↓

transport

↓

specific vehicle

↓

specific type of recipient

rather than an entirely abstract claim that Emanuela disappeared into an unnamed criminal hideout.

That specificity is one reason the testimony deserves to be examined seriously despite its weaknesses.

Minardi was not accepted by the Roman prosecutors as an entirely reliable witness.

The material records that investigators identified **contradictions and implausibilities** in her statements. Her testimony sometimes contained accurate names, places and events, but at other times contained claims that were chronologically impossible or otherwise inconsistent with reality.

That is a serious limitation.

It means that the handover cannot be treated as established fact simply because Minardi described it.

But the existence of contradictions does not automatically make every individual recollection false.

The material specifically adopts a **fractional evaluation** of her testimony: each proposition must be considered separately.

This is particularly important here because the handover consists of several distinct propositions:

Emanuela was in De Pedis's custody.

She was transported.

She was taken to a Vatican-associated location.

A Vatican-plated vehicle was present.

A man appeared to be a priest.

The man received Emanuela.

The man was Marcinkus.

These are not one proposition.

They have different evidentiary status.

The material classifies:

Emanuela transported in the circumstances described — unresolved.

Vatican vehicle involved — unresolved.

Vatican priest received Emanuela — unresolved.

Marcinkus ordered the kidnapping — unproven.

That classification should govern the narrative.

The handover therefore remains one of the most important **alleged events** in the reconstruction, rather than one of its established facts.

Yet its significance increases because it fits the larger model developed in the investigation.

The model has three major stages:

Stage One — Recruitment

Possible Avon opportunity

↓

Emanuela leaves normal routine

↓

disappearance

Stage Two — Criminal acquisition

De Pedis / criminal associates

↓

Emanuela

↓

confinement

Stage Three — Vatican interface

transport

↓

Vatican-plated Mercedes

↓

clerical-looking man

↓

possible Vatican-connected custody.

The handover therefore provides the transition between Stage Two and Stage Three.

It is the **bridge event**.

The bridge becomes even more important because the material separately identifies a possible relationship between De Pedis and Marcinkus.

Minardi claimed that she knew Marcinkus through De Pedis.

She also claimed that she had personally brought women to Marcinkus.

And she claimed that De Pedis told her that the high prelate at the Vatican petrol station was Marcinkus.

Those statements mean that the alleged handover is not isolated from the Marcinkus story.

Instead, the two strands potentially reinforce one another:

MINARDI

↓

DE PEDIS

↔

MARCINKUS

and:

DE PEDIS

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN VEHICLE

↓

CLERICAL MAN.

The problem is that both strands ultimately depend heavily on Minardi's testimony.

That is why the evidence must not be overstated.

The relationship between De Pedis and Minardi is established.

The relationship between De Pedis and Marcinkus is an important allegation.

The relationship between Minardi and Marcinkus is an important allegation.

The identification of the clerical man as Marcinkus is unresolved.

The connection between that man and Emanuela is unresolved.

The alleged order from Marcinkus remains unproven.

This is precisely why the intermediary hypothesis is valuable.

It does not require the weakest identification step to carry the entire reconstruction.

Instead:

DE PEDIS

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN INTERMEDIARY

↓

POSSIBLE SENIOR VATICAN FIGURE

This is a structurally more flexible model.

It also explains why the later Vatican network contains multiple names.

If an operation existed, different people could have performed different functions.

Security

transport

financial management

medical assistance

institutional handling

international movement

could all have been separate functions.

The handover therefore does not need to be the work of one individual.

It may have been a transfer between layers.

That possibility is central to the reconstruction.

The most important unresolved figure is consequently not necessarily Marcinkus.

It is the **unidentified priest**.

He is the person who physically bridges the two environments.

He could have been:

another monsignor

Vatican security

a priest attached to the Secretariat of State

someone working for Marcinkus

another official with authorized Vatican transport.

The identity of this person could potentially resolve several questions simultaneously.

If he were identified as Vatican security, the transport branch would become clearer.

If he were connected to the Secretariat of State, the institutional branch would change.

If he worked for Marcinkus, the Marcinkus hypothesis would gain a new layer of corroboration.

If he were entirely unrelated to Marcinkus, the sexual-network theory would have to be reconstructed differently.

And if the vehicle or the man were misidentified, the Vatican transfer theory would become substantially weaker.

That is why the handover should not be buried beneath the later theories.

It is the central physical event connecting the two worlds.

The material therefore reaches a cautious but important conclusion:

The alleged Vatican-plated vehicle and clerical recipient constitute the strongest point of transition in Minardi's account from De Pedis's criminal environment to the Vatican hypothesis. The recipient cannot be conclusively identified as Marcinkus; the more useful reconstruction is that he may have been an intermediary acting for Marcinkus or another senior Vatican figure.

The difference between these formulations is substantial.

The first says:

"Marcinkus received Emanuela."

The second says:

"Emanuela was allegedly transferred through a Vatican-connected intermediary whose ultimate recipient or controller remains unidentified."

The second is what the evidence can currently support.

And that distinction will become even more important when we examine why Marcinkus enters the reconstruction in the first place.

His significance does not depend solely upon the identity of the man in the Mercedes.

It also comes from Minardi's separate claims about women whom she allegedly supplied to him.

That is the next layer of the story.

Marcinkus and the Women

Paul Marcinkus enters the sexual-exploitation branch of the Emanuela reconstruction through **Sabrina Minardi**, who claimed that she knew him through her relationship with Enrico "Renatino" De Pedis and that she personally supplied women to him. These allegations must be kept strictly separate from Marcinkus's documented position as a major Vatican financial figure. The financial record establishes Marcinkus's role at the IOR and his relationship with the Banco Ambrosiano environment; the claims concerning women, prostitution and sexual exploitation are allegations arising principally from Minardi's testimony.

This distinction is essential because Marcinkus occupies two very different positions in our material.

The first is historical and documented.

The second is testimonial and disputed.

The documented Marcinkus

IOR chief

↓

major Vatican financial authority

↓

relationship with Banco Ambrosiano

↓

relationship with Roberto Calvi

↓

position within the Vatican financial network.

The alleged Marcinkus

relationship with De Pedis

↓

women allegedly supplied through Minardi

↓

alleged sexual relationships / exploitation

↓

possible connection to the wider sexual environment surrounding the Orlandi hypothesis.

These two Marcinkus stories intersect because the same person appears in both.

But one must not be used automatically to prove the other.

His position at the IOR does not prove that he sexually exploited women.

Minardi's allegations concerning women do not prove that he participated in Emanuela's disappearance.

And the existence of a relationship between Marcinkus and De Pedis, if established, would not by itself prove the kidnapping.

Each proposition requires its own evidence.

The allegation concerning women is nevertheless significant because Minardi presents herself not merely as someone who heard rumors about Marcinkus.

She claims to have **personally participated**.

According to the material, *Atto di dolore* reproduces Minardi's statement that she procured prostitutes for Marcinkus and describes the alleged residence at **Via di Porta Angelica**. Contemporary reporting also recorded her claim that she personally supplied prostitutes to him and that investigators identified an apartment corresponding to her description.

This gives the allegation a different character from a rumor passed between strangers.

Minardi's claim is:

I knew him.

I met him.

I personally brought women to him.

I knew him through De Pedis.

Those are claims about her own experiences.

That does not make them true automatically.

But it means that, if they are false, the relevant question is not simply where she heard the story.

It is:

Why did she make a detailed claim about her own alleged participation?

And if they are true:

What was the relationship between Marcinkus and the women allegedly supplied through De Pedis's criminal network?

That is a distinct investigative question from the Orlandi kidnapping itself.

The material explicitly identifies it as such:

Did Marcinkus maintain sexual relationships with women supplied through De Pedis's criminal network?

That question matters because it could establish a pre-existing relationship between three otherwise separate worlds:

ROMAN CRIMINAL NETWORK

↔

DE PEDIS

↔

MARCINKUS

↔

WOMEN SUPPLIED THROUGH THE NETWORK.

If that relationship were independently corroborated, it would provide a much stronger context for the later claim that Emanuela may have entered a similar environment.

Without such corroboration, the connection remains testimony.

This is why the material treats the **Marcinkus–Minardi connection as one of the weakest major links** in the overall Orlandi reconstruction.

The weakness does not mean the allegation should be omitted.

It means it must be presented correctly.

Minardi is an important witness.

Her testimony is detailed.

Some elements of her testimony have potential corroboration.

But her overall reliability was seriously challenged.

The Roman prosecutors ultimately regarded her as unreliable because of **contradictions and implausibilities** in her statements. The material notes that she alternated between moments in which she recalled names, places and events accurately and other accounts that were incompatible with known chronology or reality.

This is especially important because one of the examples concerns her account of a supposed second body associated with Domenico Nicitra.

The chronology made the story impossible: Nicitra's disappearance occurred in 1993, while De Pedis had already died in 1990. The example illustrates why investigators could not simply accept Minardi's entire narrative as a continuous factual account.

But that does not necessarily invalidate every statement she made.

The material specifically argues for **fractional evaluation**.

That means:

Minardi knew De Pedis — established.

Minardi knew people in his criminal environment — strongly supported.

Minardi knew Marcinkus — alleged / potentially corroborable.

Minardi supplied women to Marcinkus — allegation requiring corroboration.

De Pedis knew Marcinkus — important allegation.

Minardi's account of Emanuela's transport — unresolved.

Vatican vehicle involved — unresolved.

Vatican priest received Emanuela — unresolved.

Marcinkus ordered the kidnapping — unproven.

This classification allows the book to take Minardi seriously without making her testimony into an established historical record.

Her alleged relationship with Marcinkus is especially interesting because the material records that she did not describe herself as an accidental observer of his life.

She claimed that she had direct access.

She claimed that she had met him through De Pedis.

She claimed that she had taken women to him.

And she separately associated Marcinkus with the alleged transfer of Emanuela.

Those claims create a potential chain:

MINARDI

↓

DE PEDIS

↔

MARCINKUS

↓

WOMEN

and:

DE PEDIS

↓

EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN-PLATED VEHICLE

↓

HIGH PRELATE / POSSIBLE MARCINKUS.

If both branches were true, the implications would be extraordinary.

It would mean that Marcinkus was not merely a Vatican financial figure who happened to know De Pedis.

He could have been connected to a **sexual network supplied by Roman criminal intermediaries**, and Emanuela could potentially have entered the same environment.

That is why this is one of the principal hypotheses in our reconstruction.

But the word **"if"** cannot be removed.

The material does not provide independent proof that Marcinkus maintained such a network.

It provides Minardi's allegations and some reporting about them.

The existence of an apartment corresponding to the location she described is relevant corroborative material, but it does not by itself prove what occurred inside the apartment or establish that Marcinkus was sexually exploiting women there.

This is a crucial evidentiary distinction.

Location corroboration

does not equal

conduct corroboration.

A place can exist exactly where a witness says it exists without every event described by that witness having occurred there.

The same principle applies to the Vatican-plated Mercedes.

If a Vatican vehicle existed, that does not establish who was inside.

If a priest received Emanuela, that does not establish who ordered the transfer.

If the priest was Marcinkus, that still would not by itself prove sexual exploitation.

Each stage requires additional evidence.

The Marcinkus question therefore has to be divided into separate propositions.

Proposition One

Marcinkus was a major Vatican financial figure.

Documented.

Proposition Two

Marcinkus was connected to the Banco Ambrosiano / Calvi environment.

Documented.

Proposition Three

Minardi knew Marcinkus through De Pedis.

Alleged, potentially corroborable.

Proposition Four

Minardi supplied women to Marcinkus.

Allegation requiring corroboration.

Proposition Five

Marcinkus participated in a sexual network involving De Pedis.

Hypothesis based principally on the preceding allegation.

Proposition Six

Marcinkus was involved in Emanuela's kidnapping.

Unproven.

Proposition Seven

Marcinkus sexually abused Emanuela.

Unproven.

This sequence is important because the seventh proposition is the one that would be easiest to write sensationally and hardest to establish.

The book must not collapse the entire chain into:

"Marcinkus abused Emanuela."

Our material does not establish that.

The defensible formulation is:

Minardi's testimony potentially places Marcinkus within a sexual environment involving women allegedly supplied through De Pedis, and separately places Emanuela within a transfer from De Pedis's custody toward a Vatican-connected man whom she later associated with Marcinkus. Whether these two branches actually connect remains unresolved.

That final sentence is the heart of the reconstruction.

The two branches are:

Branch A — Marcinkus / women

De Pedis

↔

Minardi

↓

women allegedly supplied

↓

Marcinkus

Branch B — Emanuela

De Pedis

↓

Emanuela

↓

Vatican-plated Mercedes

↓

clerical man

↓

possible Marcinkus / intermediary.

The critical question is:

Do Branch A and Branch B connect?

The material explicitly identifies this as the central unresolved issue.

There are several possible answers.

They connect directly.

Marcinkus was the recipient or controller of Emanuela and had previously received women through the same criminal network.

They connect indirectly.

Marcinkus was connected to the sexual environment, but another Vatican intermediary handled Emanuela.

They are partially connected.

The De Pedis–Marcinkus relationship was real, but Emanuela's disappearance was unrelated to the sexual allegations.

They do not connect at all.

Minardi's accounts about Marcinkus and Emanuela may be separate inaccurate recollections.

The material does not permit us to choose conclusively between these possibilities.

That is why Marcinkus should be described as **high interest**, rather than as an established perpetrator in the Orlandi case.

His documented financial position makes him historically important.

His alleged relationship with De Pedis makes him relevant to the criminal branch.

His alleged sexual relationships with women make him relevant to the sexual-exploitation branch.

And the alleged identification of the Vatican recipient as Marcinkus makes him relevant to the Emanuela branch.

The convergence is what makes him significant.

The evidence is not equally strong at every point.

The financial role is the strongest.

The sexual allegations are weaker.

The direct Orlandi connection is weaker still.

This hierarchy must remain visible.

The material itself places Marcinkus in a special category:

Documented

- IOR chief;
- major Vatican financial power;
- Calvi/Ambrosiano relationship;
- Pazienza relationship;
- survival of demands for his resignation;
- protection by John Paul II.

Alleged

- sexual relationship/exploitation involving women;
- De Pedis allegedly supplied women to him;
- alleged involvement in the Orlandi kidnapping;
- alleged connection to the alleged sexual incident involving Emanuela;
- possible relationship to a Vatican/organized-crime sexual network.

This distinction also prevents another error: treating the IOR itself as proof of sexual wrongdoing.

The IOR belongs to the **financial branch**.

The alleged women belong to the **sexual branch**.

De Pedis belongs to the **criminal branch**.

Emanuela belongs to the **Orlandi branch**.

Marcinkus is the person around whom those branches potentially intersect.

That is why he is so important to this book.

But it is precisely because he sits at the intersection that the evidence has to be handled more carefully, not less.

The strongest version of the hypothesis is therefore not:

"Marcinkus was the man in the Mercedes."

Nor:

"Marcinkus ordered Emanuela's kidnapping."

It is:

Minardi's testimony describes a pre-existing relationship between De Pedis and Marcinkus involving women allegedly supplied through the criminal network. The same witness separately describes Emanuela being transferred from De Pedis's custody toward a Vatican-connected man. Because she later associated that high prelate with Marcinkus, the two branches may represent the same environment—but the connection has not been independently established.

The middleman hypothesis remains important here.

If the recipient was an intermediary, then the structure could have been:

MARCINKUS

↓

possible instruction / authority

↓

DE PEDIS NETWORK

↓

EMANUELA

↓

CRIMINAL CUSTODY

↓

VATICAN INTERMEDIARY

↓

VATICAN-RELATED CUSTODY.

This model allows Marcinkus to remain a possible senior figure without forcing him to be the man physically receiving Emanuela.

It also explains why the identification problem cannot be solved simply by asking whether Minardi recognized him.

The more fundamental question is:

What role, if any, did Marcinkus occupy in the system?

Was he:

a financial intermediary?

a personal acquaintance of De Pedis?

a consumer of women supplied through the criminal network?

a person connected to Emanuela's transfer?

a senior figure behind an intermediary?

or simply a powerful Vatican official whom Minardi later incorporated into a broader story?

The material does not yet establish which answer is correct.

The strongest evidence for a sexual relationship with women remains Minardi's own allegation.

The strongest evidence for his institutional importance is independent of her.

The strongest evidence for his possible Orlandi connection is the combination of her testimony and the alleged Vatican-plated handover.

That produces a clear evidentiary hierarchy:

DOCUMENTED FINANCIAL MARCINKUS

↓

ALLEGED SEXUAL-NETWORK MARCINKUS

↓

POSSIBLE ORLANDI MARCINKUS

The further down the chain we go, the greater the uncertainty.

This is not a reason to remove Marcinkus from the story.

It is the reason he must remain in it.

A historical account that simply ignored the allegations would omit a major part of the reconstruction.

An account that presented the allegations as proven would go beyond the evidence.

The correct position lies between those extremes.

Marcinkus was unquestionably one of the most powerful Vatican financial figures connected to the events surrounding the Ambrosiano crisis.

Minardi claims that she knew him personally through De Pedis and supplied women to him.

She separately places a Vatican-connected man at the end of Emanuela's alleged transfer and associates that man with Marcinkus.

The same criminal environment therefore appears on both sides of the story.

That is why the relationship matters.

The question is not merely whether Marcinkus was a powerful Vatican banker.

It is whether his alleged relationship with De Pedis and Minardi provides evidence of a **pre-existing sexual network** into which Emanuela may later have been introduced.

If that connection were independently corroborated, the significance would be enormous.

If it were disproved, one of the major pillars of the sexual-exploitation reconstruction would collapse.

At present, the material leaves the matter unresolved.

The responsible conclusion is therefore:

Marcinkus is a high-interest figure in the Orlandi sexual-exploitation reconstruction because a direct witness, Sabrina Minardi, claims personal familiarity with him and claims to have supplied women to him through De Pedis. Those allegations are separate from his documented financial role and cannot by themselves establish his involvement in Emanuela's disappearance. Their importance lies in the possibility that they reveal a pre-existing relationship between Vatican power and the Roman criminal environment that could explain how the alleged handover of Emanuela became possible.

The next stage of the reconstruction must therefore move beyond Marcinkus himself.

If the Vatican connection was real, **who else was involved in moving, protecting, accommodating or managing Emanuela?**

The answer may lie not with one powerful man, but with the wider institutional network surrounding the alleged operation.

The Vatican Gardens Incident

The reconstruction of Emanuela Orlandi's disappearance becomes considerably darker when we place the reported **Vatican Gardens incident** before the disappearance itself. According to testimony reported in the material, Emanuela had told a friend about an encounter during a walk in the Vatican Gardens in which a person described as being **very close to the Pope** made an unwanted advance toward her. The friend reportedly remembered

that Emanuela was disturbed by what had happened, but that she did not tell her family about it.

This account is important because it potentially moves the beginning of the story backwards.

Until this point, the reconstruction could begin with the Avon proposal:

AVON OPPORTUNITY

↓

POSSIBLE RECRUITMENT

↓

DISAPPEARANCE

But if the Vatican Gardens account is genuine, there may have been an earlier stage:

VATICAN ACCESS

↓

UNWANTED SEXUAL APPROACH

↓

Emanuela becomes known to a powerful person

↓

LATER RECRUITMENT

↓

DISAPPEARANCE.

That possibility changes the nature of the case.

A random kidnapping is one thing.

A kidnapping of a girl who had already attracted the unwanted sexual attention of someone with access to the Vatican is another.

The material therefore identifies the Gardens testimony as potentially relevant to the question of **selection**.

Was Emanuela randomly chosen because she happened to be the daughter of a Vatican employee?

Or had someone already noticed her, interacted with her, and developed an interest in her?

The second possibility would provide an explanation for why the Vatican connection appears repeatedly throughout the reconstruction.

The material formulates this as the **selection hypothesis**:

someone knew Emanuela;

→ had access to her;

→ knew her movements;

→ knew she attended music school;

→ knew her Vatican connections;

→ had previously interacted with her;

→ and eventually arranged or facilitated her disappearance.

The Gardens incident is therefore potentially the earliest piece of that chain.

But we must distinguish carefully between what the testimony actually says and what our reconstruction infers from it.

What the testimony says

Emanuela reportedly described an unwanted advance.

The person was described as being very close to the Pope.

The encounter allegedly occurred in the Vatican Gardens.

Emanuela was reportedly disturbed by it.

What our reconstruction infers

The person may have developed a sexual interest in Emanuela.

The encounter may have established prior access to her.

The later disappearance may therefore have involved someone who already knew her.

The person who approached her may potentially have been connected to the subsequent operation.

These are inferences.

They are not contained as established facts in the testimony itself.

The distinction is essential because the identity of the alleged man has never been established by the material.

This is where **Marcinkus** enters the reconstruction.

The material records a 2025 report in which the witness's account concerned a **tall, thin, light-eyed prelate**, and photographs of prelates—including Marcinkus—were reportedly shown to the witness.

That creates a possible connection:

VATICAN GARDENS

↓

senior prelate

↓

sexualized advance toward Emanuela

↓

possible identification through photographs

↓

Marcinkus branch.

But the material does not establish:

Emanuela

↓

Marcinkus

↓

sexual assault

↓

kidnapping.

That is a reconstruction we might make if several independent elements converge, but it cannot be presented as what the Gardens testimony itself proves.

The distinction becomes particularly important because Marcinkus already appears elsewhere in our investigation.

We have:

Marcinkus

→ IOR

→ Calvi

→ Pazienza

→ Vatican financial environment.

And:

Marcinkus

→ alleged relationship with De Pedis

→ alleged women supplied through Minardi

→ possible sexual environment.

And now:

Emanuela

→ reported Vatican Gardens encounter

→ senior prelate

→ possible Marcinkus identification.

These are three separate strands.

The first is strongly documented.

The second is principally testimonial.

The third is testimonial and identification-dependent.

The central question is whether they belong to the same story.

If the man in the Gardens was Marcinkus, and if Minardi's allegations about Marcinkus and women are substantially correct, then Emanuela may have encountered the same person or the same sexual environment before her disappearance.

The possible sequence would become:

MARCINKUS / VATICAN SEXUAL ENVIRONMENT

↓

EARLIER ACCESS TO EMANUELA

↓

VATICAN GARDENS INCIDENT

↓

AVON RECRUITMENT

↓

DE PEDIS ACQUISITION

↓

VATICAN TRANSFER

That would be an extraordinarily significant reconstruction.

It would mean that the kidnapping was not the beginning of the relationship between Emanuela and her alleged exploiters.

It could have been the **escalation of an existing relationship of sexual access and institutional proximity**.

The material explicitly identifies this possibility:

If the Gardens incident really occurred, it might mean the kidnapping wasn't the beginning of the story. It might have been the escalation of an existing sexual-access relationship.

That is the darker possibility.

It would also explain why the selection hypothesis is important.

A person who had already seen Emanuela could potentially know:

where she studied

when she attended music school

where she lived

who her family was

that she was a Vatican citizen

how to approach her without immediately alarming her.

Such knowledge could make recruitment considerably easier.

The Avon proposal would then no longer be an isolated coincidence.

It could have been the mechanism used to convert prior familiarity into physical access.

The proposed chain becomes:

PRIOR CONTACT

↓

SEXUAL INTEREST

↓

TARGET SELECTION

↓

APPROACH

↓

AVON OFFER

↓

MEETING

↓

ABDUCTION.

Again, this is our inference.

The Gardens testimony itself establishes only the alleged earlier encounter.

The Avon offer establishes only that an apparently legitimate employment opportunity existed.

The disappearance establishes that Emanuela vanished.

The reconstruction connects these elements because together they form a potentially coherent sequence.

The reason this matters is that the sequence has a different explanatory power from the theory of a random kidnapping.

If Emanuela was randomly abducted for political or financial reasons, there is no obvious reason why a previous sexual encounter should exist.

If she was deliberately selected because someone had developed an interest in her, the Gardens account becomes highly relevant.

If the same person or network later had access to the Avon recruitment mechanism, the connection becomes stronger.

If the same person or network was connected to the later Vatican transfer, the entire sequence begins to resemble an organized exploitation process.

The complete hypothesis becomes:

VATICAN ACCESS

↓

SEXUAL APPROACH

↓

SELECTION

↓

RECRUITMENT

↓

ABDUCTION

↓

CRIMINAL CUSTODY

↓

VATICAN TRANSFER

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION.

This is the core sexual-exploitation reconstruction now emerging from the material.

The Gardens incident is particularly important because it supplies the **pre-disappearance sexual element**.

The Minardi testimony supplies the **post-disappearance criminal and transfer element**.

The Marcinkus allegations supply a possible **Vatican sexual-network element**.

And the expenditure dossier potentially supplies the **long-term custody element**.

These are not one piece of evidence.

They are four different evidentiary streams:

GARDENS

→ alleged sexual approach.

MINARDI

→ alleged criminal custody and Vatican transfer.

MARCINKUS / WOMEN

→ alleged pre-existing sexual network.

DOSSIER

→ purported long-term Vatican expenditure connected to Emanuela.

The possibility that they converge is what makes the theory significant.

There is also an important question concerning the alleged attacker.

The material describes him as a **person very close to the Pope**, rather than simply an unknown priest. That description potentially places him relatively high within the Vatican hierarchy. If that characterization is accurate, then the encounter was not merely an unfortunate interaction with an ordinary stranger. It would have involved a person possessing unusual access to Emanuela's institutional environment.

This is where the Vatican environment itself becomes relevant.

Emanuela was not simply a visitor.

She was a Vatican citizen.

Her father worked in the papal household.

She lived inside Vatican City.

She attended a music school operating in a building associated with the Vatican's institutional property system.

Her movements therefore occurred within a highly interconnected social environment.

Someone with privileged access could potentially know more about her than an ordinary outsider.

That does not establish surveillance.

But it makes the **selection hypothesis logically possible**.

And if the Gardens incident really happened, it provides a possible mechanism for that knowledge.

The sequence could have been:

CONTACT

↓

FAMILIARITY

↓

SEXUAL INTEREST

↓

OBSERVATION

↓

RECRUITMENT

The important point is that the recruitment mechanism would not have required the perpetrator to approach Emanuela openly as a sexual predator.

A job offer could provide a socially acceptable second contact.

The first contact could remain hidden.

The second could appear ordinary.

The girl could then leave her normal routine voluntarily.

Only afterward would the criminal element become visible.

This is precisely why the Avon offer matters so much in conjunction with the Gardens testimony.

Neither element alone proves a trafficking operation.

Together they potentially describe:

sexualized prior attention

-

a convenient opportunity to meet

-

a fifteen-year-old victim

-

subsequent disappearance.

That combination deserves to be treated as a meaningful part of the reconstruction.

The material also connects this possibility to the earliest investigative thinking surrounding the case.

One of the investigators, **Gangi**, reportedly developed an early "tratta delle bianche" theory, while General **Obinu** later recalled that his own initial assessment was a sexual abduction before the political-message machinery became dominant.

This is important because it demonstrates that the sexual interpretation did not originate solely from our later reconstruction.

The possibility of sexual abduction existed during the original investigation itself.

The later Minardi testimony provided another sexual/criminal layer.

The Gardens testimony potentially supplies an earlier sexual-contact layer.

The developing model therefore has historical continuity:

1983 investigators

→ sexual / trafficking hypothesis

later Minardi

→ sexual / Vatican hypothesis

later Gardens testimony

→ alleged prior sexual approach.

That does not prove that the theories are all describing the same operation.

But it means the sexual interpretation is not an invention created retrospectively from one modern witness.

The material also contains a crucial caution.

In April 2026, the parliamentary commission investigating Emanuela Orlandi and Mirella Gregori reportedly rejected the hypothesis that the two girls were part of a serial **"white slave trade"** or organized trafficking network of girls in Rome. The commission concluded that it had found no concrete evidence connecting the cases to other young women's disappearances.

That conclusion must be preserved.

It means that our reconstruction cannot simply state:

"The Orlandi case has been officially established as part of a Roman trafficking network."

It has not.

The parliamentary conclusion concerns the broader theory of an organized trafficking network linking the Orlandi and Gregori disappearances.

Our hypothesis is narrower.

We are examining whether **Emanuela herself may have been deliberately selected and sexually exploited by a Vatican-connected individual or network**, potentially through criminal intermediaries.

The two propositions are not identical.

The first requires a broad organized network involving multiple girls.

The second requires a specific exploitation chain involving Emanuela.

The rejection of the first does not logically eliminate the second.

But it does remind us that the broader trafficking theory should not be presented as established.

The Gardens account therefore remains one of the most intriguing pieces of the narrower hypothesis.

It potentially provides something that the later evidence cannot provide:

a reason why Emanuela may have been selected.

The later disappearance tells us that something happened.

The Avon proposal may explain how access was obtained.

Minardi may explain how she entered the criminal environment.

The Vatican vehicle may explain the transfer.

But the Gardens incident potentially explains **why her name was already known to someone with Vatican access**.

That is its unique importance.

The reconstruction can therefore be stated:

If the Gardens testimony is accurate, Emanuela may have attracted unwanted sexual attention from a person with privileged Vatican access before she disappeared. If that person was connected to the later operation, the disappearance may have been the escalation of an existing relationship of access rather than an entirely random kidnapping.

And that possibility brings Marcinkus back into the story.

The material does not prove that Marcinkus was the Gardens attacker.

It does not prove that he sexually assaulted Emanuela.

It does not prove that he ordered her kidnapping.

But it provides a logical path through which his alleged sexual-network role could potentially connect to the earlier Gardens encounter.

The possible structure is:

GARDENS PRELATE

↓

sexual interest in Emanuela

↓

later recruitment

↓

De Pedis network

↓

Vatican transfer

and separately:

MARCINKUS

↓

De Pedis relationship

↓

women allegedly supplied

↓

sexual environment.

The central unresolved question is whether:

GARDENS PRELATE = MARCINKUS

and/or:

GARDENS PRELATE = LATER VATICAN RECIPIENT.

If either equality were demonstrated, the reconstruction would change dramatically.

For now, they remain hypotheses.

But they are hypotheses grounded in the convergence of specific testimony rather than invented connections.

The most important conclusion from this page is therefore not an identification.

It is a change in the chronology.

The sexual-exploitation hypothesis may begin **before 22 June 1983**.

Emanuela may have been noticed.

She may have been approached.

She may have been disturbed by an unwanted sexual advance.

She may subsequently have been offered an apparently respectable job opportunity.

And she may then have disappeared.

If these elements belong to one chain, the kidnapping was not the beginning.

It was the **operational escalation**.

That is the possibility that makes the Vatican Gardens incident one of the most important pieces of the entire Orlandi reconstruction.

The Missing Girl Who May Not Have Died Immediately

The conventional disappearance narrative naturally leads to the question of what happened to Emanuela after she vanished. One possibility is that she was killed relatively soon afterward and that the subsequent decades consist largely of misinformation, competing theories and institutional concealment. But the material assembled in our investigation permits a different and considerably more disturbing reconstruction: **Emanuela may have survived**

for an extended period after the kidnapping and may have remained under controlled conditions, possibly for years.

This possibility emerges most strongly from the alleged **Vatican expenditure dossier**.

The document, published by Emiliano Fittipaldi and described in the material as a purported Vatican accounting record, is dated **28 March 1998** and bears the name/signature of Cardinal **Lorenzo Antonetti**, then president of APSA. It purports to summarize expenditure relating to Emanuela from **1983 through July 1997**. Its opening language concerns activities following her removal from her home, rather than simply describing an ordinary missing-person investigation.

That distinction is fundamental.

If the document were merely an accounting of money spent investigating a disappearance, there would be no necessary implication that Emanuela remained alive.

But the material describes entries that look different from ordinary investigative expenses:

accommodation

food

medical care

gynecological expenditure

transfers

long-term residential payments

and finally:

transfer to Vatican City with related final formalities in 1997.

These entries create a possible picture of a person being **maintained somewhere over an extended period**.

The chronology is extraordinary:

1983

Emanuela disappears.

↓

1983–85

London accommodation expenses.

↓

1985–88

additional London-related activity and Cibin's travel.

↓

1990s

further accommodation and medical expenditure.

↓

1993–97

continuing expenses.

↓

1997

final transfer toward Vatican City.

↓

1998

Antonetti's purported summary.

If those entries relate to Emanuela personally, the implications are enormous.

The question would no longer be:

"Where did Emanuela disappear?"

It would become:

"Where was Emanuela kept after she disappeared?"

That is a completely different investigation.

The first question assumes that the disappearance marks the beginning and end of the physical event.

The second assumes that the disappearance was the beginning of a **long-term custody operation**.

The material explicitly identifies this as the central alternative:

Was Emanuela maintained somewhere under Vatican-connected protection or control for years?

This possibility fits the Minardi reconstruction in a striking way.

Minardi's testimony describes:

Emanuela

↓

De Pedis-associated custody

↓

transfer

↓

Vatican-plated vehicle

↓

apparently clerical recipient.

The dossier potentially continues the story:

Vatican-connected custody

↓

accommodation

↓

medical care

↓

London

↓

further transfers

↓

1997 transfer toward Vatican City.

The two branches therefore potentially form one continuous chain:

ABDUCTION

↓

CRIMINAL CUSTODY

↓

VATICAN TRANSFER

↓

LONG-TERM CUSTODY

↓

LONDON

↓

MEDICAL / GYNECOLOGICAL CARE

↓

LATER TRANSFER

↓

VATICAN CITY.

This is why the dossier is so consequential to the sexual-exploitation hypothesis.

If Emanuela died shortly after the kidnapping, long-term accommodation and personal medical expenses would require a different explanation.

If she survived, those expenses could potentially represent the practical cost of keeping her alive and hidden.

The material does not establish that the person maintained by these expenses was Emanuela.

That limitation must remain.

The dossier is itself classified in our material as **extremely important but unauthenticated**. It has never been conclusively authenticated as a genuine Vatican accounting record.

But "unauthenticated" is not the same as "meaningless."

The document contains an extraordinary concentration of details:

London

female accommodation

medical expenses

gynecology

Cibin

foreign operations

Casaroli

Poletti

transfers

final movement to Vatican City.

Its significance lies precisely in the fact that it appears to combine two categories of expenditure.

The material identifies:

Personal / custody expenditure

accommodation

food

medical care

gynecology

transfers

health-related expenses

and:

Operational expenditure

investigations

foreign operations

tapes

phonographic analysis

press management

depistaggio

Casaroli

Poletti.

This makes the document potentially more coherent as an accounting of an **operation surrounding Emanuela**, rather than merely a personal expense sheet.

The distinction is important.

A line for **L.50 million associated with Casaroli's reserved investigation** cannot be treated as Emanuela's personal living expense.

Likewise, an entry involving **gynecology** does not automatically mean Emanuela herself received treatment.

The most coherent interpretation of the five pages is therefore that they may represent a consolidated account containing both:

expenses incurred in relation to Emanuela personally

and

expenses incurred investigating, managing or concealing the Emanuela affair.

If that interpretation is correct, the document becomes a possible map of the entire operation.

And within that map, the personal-looking expenses become particularly important.

The material calculates approximately **L.482.4 million** in visible expenditure, corresponding to approximately **$368,000 in contemporary nominal U.S. dollars**, before an unspecified reimbursement connected to Dr. Regan. Approximately **L.226 million**, around **$172,000**, consists of expenses that plausibly look personal or custodial, including accommodation, medical care, transfers and final relocation.

Two especially large categories stand out:

L.100 million — 1988–1993

L.70 million — 1993–1997.

Together these represent **L.170 million** in continuing accommodation-related expenditure.

That is not the financial profile of a single short-lived response to a disappearance.

It describes, at least on paper, **years of continuing expenditure**.

The material therefore asks the obvious question:

Who was being maintained?

If the answer was Emanuela, the entire case changes.

The possibility of long-term survival becomes much stronger.

The London branch becomes much more important.

The Catholic institutions appearing in the expenditure record become potentially relevant.

The medical and gynecological expenses become potentially connected to the physical condition of a woman being maintained under controlled circumstances.

And the repeated involvement of Vatican personnel becomes potentially significant.

One of the most striking figures is **Camillo Cibin**, the senior Vatican security official.

The alleged dossier contains expenses connected with Cibin's transfers and stay in London during **1985–1988**.

If the dossier is genuine and the London activity concerns Emanuela, the presence of the head of Vatican security is difficult to dismiss as ordinary coincidence.

The possible chain is:

EMANUELA

↕

VATICAN EXPENDITURE

↕

LONDON

↕

CIBIN

↕

VATICAN SECURITY APPARATUS.

This does not prove that Cibin personally guarded Emanuela.

It does not prove that he knew her.

It does not prove that he participated in sexual exploitation.

But it potentially places the **Vatican security apparatus** inside the long-term London branch of the reconstruction.

That is significant because a person being deliberately hidden for years would require precisely the kind of institutional control that security personnel could provide.

The material also identifies **Catholic women's accommodation** in London.

The alleged expenditure refers to **176 Chapman Road**, reported by Fittipaldi as a likely mistaken reference to **176 Clapham Road**, associated with the Scalabrinian presence in London. The property had a female-hostel function, while later investigation indicated that management involved the **Sisters of Santa Dorotea di Cemmo**.

This is important because it creates a plausible concealment environment.

A teenage girl hidden inside a Catholic female residence could potentially disappear into an environment where:

religious authority

-

female residential accommodation

- **social isolation**
- **restricted information**

could make outside discovery difficult.

The proposed mechanism is:

NEW NAME

↓

RELIGIOUS / SOCIAL ISOLATION

↓

RESTRICTED CORRESPONDENCE

↓

INSTITUTIONAL CONTROL OF INFORMATION

↓

FAMILY UNABLE TO CONTACT HER

↓

OUTSIDE INVESTIGATORS FIND NO OBVIOUS EMANUELA.

This is not proof that Emanuela lived under a false name in a convent.

It is a **logically coherent concealment mechanism**.

And it becomes much more interesting when placed beside the expenditure trail.

The material also identifies **6 Ellerdale Road**, associated with **St Marcellina**, another Catholic female institution, and later expenditure connected with **St Mary's Hospital** and obstetrics/gynaecology.

The developing London chain therefore becomes:

176 Clapham Road

↓

Catholic female accommodation

↓

possible Emanuela?

↓

6 Ellerdale Road / St Marcellina

↓

possible further accommodation

↓

St Mary's

↓

obstetrics / gynaecology

↓

later transfers

↓

Vatican City.

This is the possible survival story.

It does not require Emanuela to have remained in one place.

In fact, movement would have been one of the most effective ways to conceal a person.

The model could be:

LOCATION A

↓

new identity

↓

LOCATION B

↓

medical treatment

↓

LOCATION C

↓

new accommodation

↓

London

↓

Vatican City.

Every move would make discovery harder.

Every institution could know only part of the story.

A person might know her under one name.

Another might know her under another.

A religious superior might know only that she had been entrusted to the institution.

A driver might know only where to take her.

A doctor might know only the patient identity presented to him or her.

A Vatican official might control the larger operation without appearing at the residential location.

This is precisely the kind of **compartmentalization** already identified elsewhere in our investigation.

The material's broader institutional model allows information to be distributed:

one person knows the victim

another knows the transport

another knows the accommodation

another knows the finances

another knows the medical care

another knows the political reason

another knows the final destination.

The resulting operation could therefore continue without any one participant possessing the complete picture.

That is one reason the possibility of long-term survival cannot be dismissed merely because no single document says:

"Emanuela Orlandi is alive at this address."

Historical reconstruction often depends upon convergence.

The material itself states the methodological principle:

A location exists

→

the location has an appropriate institutional function

→

money was paid to or for that location

→

the timing corresponds

→

transport evidence exists

→

another witness describes movement consistent with the scenario.

At some point, the combined probability becomes substantially more interesting than each individual element.

That is the reasoning being applied here.

The London hypothesis contains exactly this type of convergence:

1983 disappearance

-

1983–85 London accommodation expenditure

-

Catholic female-hostel function

-

continuing London-related expenditure

-

Cibin's involvement

-

medical / gynecological expenditure

-

later accommodation

-

1997 transfer toward Vatican City.

No individual element proves that Emanuela was alive in London.

But taken together, they create a serious alternative to the assumption of an immediate death.

The most disturbing possibility is that Emanuela could have been **alive but psychologically controlled**.

The material develops a possible mechanism involving deception and isolation.

She could have been told that her family was in danger.

She could have been told that she could not return home.

She could have been told that remaining hidden was necessary "for a while."

She could have been given another name.

She could have been made to believe that contacting her family would endanger them.

She could have been isolated from the outside world.

These possibilities are not established events.

They are mechanisms capable of explaining how a person could remain hidden for years without simply being locked in a cell.

And psychological control could be combined with religious authority.

A Catholic institution could potentially provide:

obedience

confession

spiritual authority

social isolation

institutional legitimacy.

A young woman who had already experienced sexual abuse could be particularly vulnerable to manipulation through guilt, fear and religious obedience.

This connects the Orlandi hypothesis to the broader sexual-abuse investigation in the book.

The abuse model developed elsewhere is:

CLERICAL AUTHORITY

↓

SPIRITUAL DEPENDENCY

↓

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTROL

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION.

Applied hypothetically to Emanuela, it becomes:

ABDUCTION

↓

ISOLATION

↓

SPIRITUAL / PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIPULATION

↓

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

↓

CONTROLLED RESIDENCE

↓

MEDICAL CONSEQUENCES

↓

TRANSFER

↓

LONG-TERM CONCEALMENT.

That is the most disturbing version of the survival hypothesis.

It would mean that Emanuela was not merely hidden.

She was potentially **kept**.

And being kept is fundamentally different from being hidden temporarily.

A temporary hiding place suggests a short-term purpose.

A fourteen-year expenditure record suggests something else.

The material's chronology potentially describes a system that had to provide:

housing

food

medical care

transport

security

institutional accommodation

for a prolonged period.

If Emanuela was the person being maintained, the kidnapping becomes the beginning of a **long-term custody operation**.

That would explain why the investigation has to move beyond the question of the original disappearance.

The central question becomes:

Where was she kept?

Not:

Where did she vanish?

Those are not the same question.

The first concerns a moment.

The second concerns fourteen years.

This also changes how we interpret the possibility of London.

London would not necessarily have been the place where Emanuela was originally taken.

It could have been a **later stage**.

The proposed sequence is:

ROME

↓

DE PEDIS CUSTODY

↓

VATICAN TRANSFER

↓

INITIAL VATICAN CUSTODY

↓

LONDON

↓

CATHOLIC FEMALE INSTITUTION

↓

MEDICAL CARE

↓

FURTHER MOVEMENTS

↓

VATICAN CITY.

That model explains why London appears only after the initial disappearance rather than immediately becoming the primary location.

It also provides a possible explanation for the presence of Cibin.

The Vatican security apparatus would be relevant not because every security official must have known Emanuela personally, but because moving a hidden person internationally would require coordination.

Again, this remains a hypothesis.

The dossier itself remains unauthenticated.

But the hypothesis is coherent.

The possibility that Emanuela survived is also supported indirectly by the absence of a conclusively established body or death narrative.

The material contains competing stories about her ultimate fate.

Some testimony describes death.

Other branches imply prolonged survival.

The dossier potentially describes years of expenses.

The London theory potentially describes years of accommodation.

The medical entries potentially describe a living woman's healthcare.

The 1997 entry potentially describes a final transfer.

This makes the **survival hypothesis** one of the most important unresolved questions in the entire case.

It can be expressed simply:

Death hypothesis

1983 disappearance

↓

abduction

↓

short-term custody

↓

death

↓

later misinformation / concealment.

Survival hypothesis

1983 disappearance

↓

abduction

↓

criminal custody

↓

Vatican transfer

↓

long-term custody

↓

sexual exploitation?

↓

medical care

↓

London accommodation

↓

continued concealment

↓

1997 transfer.

The second model explains more of the unusual material if the dossier is genuine.

That does not make it true.

But it gives it greater **explanatory power**.

And explanatory power is precisely what this investigation is attempting to assess.

The material itself asks whether Emanuela was:

primarily a political hostage

a financial hostage

a sexual-exploitation victim

or

a victim of a crime that subsequently became entangled with political and financial manipulation.

Our developing reconstruction increasingly favors the possibility that these categories may not be mutually exclusive.

The **hybrid hypothesis** proposes:

sexual targeting

↓

criminal intermediaries

↓

abduction

↓

concealment

↓

possible prolonged exploitation

↓

political manipulation of the disappearance

↓

financial / intelligence narratives

↓

decades of confusion.

This would explain why the case contains apparently incompatible layers.

A sexual crime could have occurred first.

The disappearance could then have been exploited for political purposes.

Financial actors could have used the situation.

Intelligence services could have introduced other narratives.

The original sexual crime could have disappeared beneath the political story.

Under this model, the famous political communications would not necessarily explain why Emanuela disappeared.

They could explain why the **public story of her disappearance became something else**.

That distinction is extremely important.

The sexual hypothesis concerns the **origin and physical fate of Emanuela**.

The political hypothesis concerns the **subsequent use of her disappearance**.

The two could coexist.

The same is true of money.

A financial motive could have become attached to the case after the original sexual crime.

The same is true of the Vatican.

A Vatican-connected person could potentially have been involved in the original exploitation while other Vatican actors subsequently managed the political consequences.

This is the logic of the hybrid model.

And it makes the survival hypothesis particularly important.

If Emanuela survived for years, then the disappearance was not simply an event that happened on 22 June 1983.

It became a **continuing operation**.

Every year required:

money

accommodation

security

medical care

transport

information control.

That is why the alleged expenditure dossier could potentially be more important than any single witness statement.

A witness can misremember.

A document, if genuine, can record repeated institutional behavior.

The problem is that we do not yet know whether the dossier is genuine.

That uncertainty must remain explicit.

But if it is genuine, the implications are difficult to avoid:

Emanuela may have survived long after 1983.

She may have lived under controlled conditions.

She may have been moved through Catholic institutions.

She may have received medical and gynecological treatment.

She may have been concealed under another identity.

She may have been returned to Vatican City in 1997.

And if the sexual-exploitation hypothesis is correct, she may have spent those years under the control of people connected to the Vatican.

The material therefore allows the possibility that Emanuela was **not killed when she disappeared**.

She may instead have disappeared from her family's life while continuing to exist somewhere inside an institutional network.

That is the most disturbing possibility because it means the word **"missing"** may conceal the wrong picture.

She may not have been missing to the people who controlled her.

They may have known exactly where she was.

The uncertainty may have belonged only to her family, investigators and the public.

The distinction is:

MISSING PERSON

versus

CONTROLLED PERSON.

The first is someone whose location is unknown.

The second is someone whose location is known to the people controlling her but deliberately concealed from everyone else.

The alleged Vatican expenditure record, if genuine, potentially describes the financial footprint of the second condition.

That is why the London trail matters.

That is why the medical entries matter.

That is why the female institutions matter.

That is why Cibin matters.

And that is why the 1997 transfer matters.

Together they suggest a possibility far more consequential than a simple disappearance:

Emanuela may have been alive for years after 1983 and may have been moved through a Vatican-connected system designed to keep her existence and location concealed.

Within the sexual-exploitation reconstruction, the implication becomes even darker:

the kidnapping may have been only the beginning of her victimization.

The real crime may have continued for years after the world believed that the girl had simply vanished.

That is the possibility that the next pages must reconstruct.

The Extraordinary Vatican Expenditure Dossier

The London branch of the Emanuela Orlandi reconstruction rests to an extraordinary degree upon a single document: a **five-page purported Vatican accounting record** describing expenditures connected with activities concerning Emanuela from the period immediately following her disappearance through **July 1997**. The document is presented in the material as a purported Vatican State expenditure account, with an opening formulation concerning activities following Emanuela's removal from her home. Its extraordinary feature is therefore not simply the amount of money recorded, but the apparent continuity of the activities over approximately **fourteen years**.

The first principle governing the interpretation of this document is that it must not be presented as authenticated when it has not been authenticated.

Its status in our material is:

VATICAN EXPENDITURE DOSSIER

EXTREMELY IMPORTANT — BUT UNAUTHENTICATED.

It has not been conclusively established as a genuine Vatican accounting record. Contemporary and subsequent reporting has treated it as disputed or unverified. Therefore, the book will not say that the Vatican definitely spent the recorded amounts on Emanuela as an established fact. It will say that the **purported document records** these expenditures and that, **if authentic**, their implications are extraordinary.

That distinction does not make the document irrelevant.

In fact, its contents are sufficiently unusual that even the question of whether it is genuine becomes part of the story.

The document does not consist of one suspicious payment.

It contains a sequence of entries extending across different periods and different categories:

investigation

foreign activity

accommodation

food

transport

security

medical expenditure

gynecological expenditure

press management

investigation of misdirection

payments associated with senior Vatican figures

and eventual transfer to Vatican City.

The chronology recorded in the material is:

January 1983 – January 1985

→ L.89.4 million

February 1985 – February 1988

→ L.64 million

March 1988 – March 1993

→ L.234 million + unspecified Regan reimbursement

April 1993 – July 1997

→ L.95 million

giving a total visible expenditure of:

L.482.4 million + the unspecified Regan reimbursement.

The frequently reported figure of approximately **L.483 million** is therefore understandable as a rounded figure, but the calculation from the individual amounts reproduced in the material gives **L.482.4 million**.

That numerical precision matters because the total is large enough to invite misleading comparisons.

The material therefore calculates the value using the exchange rates applicable to the different periods rather than applying one exchange rate retrospectively to the entire fourteen-year period. On that basis, the visible L.482.4 million corresponds to approximately **$368,000 in contemporary nominal U.S. dollars**, plus the unspecified reimbursement associated with Dr Lesley Regan.

The calculation is approximately:

Dossier period	Lire	Approx. contemporary USD
Jan. 1983–Jan. 1985	L.89.4m	$79,800
Feb. 1985–Feb. 1988	L.64m	$49,600
Mar. 1988–Mar. 1993	L.234m	$159,500
Apr. 1993–Jul. 1997	L.95m	$79,100
Total	**L.482.4 m**	**≈ $368,000**

These are approximate contemporary-dollar values, not present-day inflation-adjusted values.

The total, however, is not the most important feature.

The most important feature is **what the money appears to have been spent on**.

The first period includes:

Sorelle Fontana source — L.450,000

SIP report — L.600,000

foreign-investigation preparation — L.450,000

D.B. — L.1,000,000

recorded tapes — L.1.5 million

Ancelle dell'Immacolata — L.400,000

movement — L.4 million

176 Chapman Road — L.8 million

formal investigation — L.23 million

Casaroli / extra Comando 1 — L.50 million.

Subtotal:

L.89.4 million.

Several things immediately stand out.

There is ordinary investigative expenditure.

There are named individuals.

There are payments associated with religious institutions.

There is movement.

And there is the first London accommodation entry:

176 Chapman Road — L.8 million for food and accommodation.

This is the entry that becomes the foundation of the London branch.

The next period contains:

Cibin / London — L.18 million

advance flat-rate payment — L.20 million

Benotti / press activity — L.5 million

depistaggio investigation — L.9 million

A.M. — L.12 million.

Subtotal:

L.64 million.

The Cibin entry is especially important.

It describes:

expenses for the transfer and stay of Commendatore Camillo Cibin at 6 Ellerdale Road, London NW3 6NB

for:

L.18 million.

Cibin was the senior Vatican security official.

The document therefore allegedly connects:

Vatican security

↓

London

↓

6 Ellerdale Road

↓

L.18 million.

That is not an ordinary hotel receipt appearing in isolation.

It is an alleged expenditure entry connecting a senior Vatican security figure to a specific London religious residence.

At the same time, the material preserves a serious contradiction.

An investigation associated with *L'Espresso* found that the address was connected with a religious institution and that a nun who had been there since the 1980s said the institution did not accommodate men and did not remember Cibin staying there.

That contradiction cannot simply be removed because it complicates the theory.

It could mean:

the dossier is false

or

the address was used administratively

or

the money covered another arrangement

or

the historical circumstances differed from the later recollection

or

something clandestine occurred that the witness did not know about.

At present, the material does not establish which explanation is correct.

The next period contains some of the largest amounts in the entire document:

phonographic analysis — L.35 million

Cibin + Buzzonetti — L.7 million

all-inclusive rate — L.100 million

St Mary's — L.3 million

Regan — unspecified

Poletti — L.80 million

third transfer — L.9 million.

Subtotal:

L.234 million + the Regan reimbursement.

Then comes the final period:

all-inclusive rate — L.70 million

health expenses — L.4 million

transfer to Vatican City / final procedures — L.21 million.

Subtotal:

L.95 million.

Two entries dominate the entire financial reconstruction:

L.100 million

and

L.70 million.

Together:

L.170 million.

That is approximately **35 percent of the entire visible expenditure**.

The wording is significant.

These payments are not described as:

investigation

or

intelligence

or

tapes.

They are described as **all-inclusive rates/fees**, with the document reportedly referring to monthly and annual details in **Attachments 21 and 22**.

This is potentially the most important financial question in the entire London theory.

What exactly did those L.100 million and L.70 million pay for?

One person?

Several people?

An institution?

A safehouse?

Accommodation?

A continuing operation?

An intelligence activity?

Something entirely different?

The answer cannot be obtained from the five pages alone.

But the amounts are sufficiently large and the payment structure sufficiently unusual that the supporting attachments could potentially transform the reconstruction.

The document reportedly refers to:

Attachment 21

for monthly and annual details concerning the L.100 million.

And:

Attachment 22

for corresponding details concerning the L.70 million.

If these attachments existed in the form described, they could potentially reveal:

month

→ **payment**

→ **recipient**

→ **location**

→ **purpose**.

That would allow the largest expenditures to be reconstructed rather than merely speculated about.

The same applies to **Attachment 28**, which reportedly contained details concerning **Dr Lesley Regan**, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, with reimbursement documentation.

This becomes significant because the material separately identifies **St Mary's Hospital** and its obstetrics/gynaecology facilities as part of the London trail.

The medical branch therefore appears in the same purported accounting record as the accommodation branch.

That produces:

female accommodation

-

medical care

-

obstetrics/gynaecology

-

continuing expenditure

-

Vatican personnel

-

London.

Within the sexual-exploitation hypothesis, that combination is extremely significant.

But again, the distinction must be maintained.

The document allegedly records gynecological expenditure.

That does **not independently prove that Emanuela received gynecological treatment**.

The material specifically notes that Dr Regan denied having invoices in Emanuela's name and could not remember whether she had treated a girl resembling her decades earlier.

Therefore:

Document allegedly shows

→ gynecological expenditure connected with the dossier.

Not established

→ Emanuela personally received the treatment.

This distinction is particularly important because the sexual-exploitation hypothesis naturally suggests possible explanations for gynecological treatment:

pregnancy

injury

sexually transmitted infection

reproductive-health care

or other consequences of repeated sexual exploitation.

But ordinary medical treatment is also possible.

We cannot choose the most sinister explanation simply because it fits the theory.

What makes the entry important is that it gives us something **testable**.

If the supporting documentation could be recovered, the identity of the patient, dates, treatment and referring organization might potentially establish whether the medical expenditure concerned Emanuela.

The same methodological principle applies to the accommodation.

The document says:

176 Chapman Road

not:

176 Clapham Road.

Fittipaldi investigated the apparent error and identified **176 Clapham Road**, a real London address associated with Catholic female accommodation. The material records the present and historical institutional connections while also warning that the exact operator in **1983–85 remains unresolved**.

This is important because the apparent error is not simply something to hide.

It is part of the evidentiary story.

A false document could have invented a completely fictional location.

Instead, the apparent "Chapman" error lands close to a real address:

176 Clapham Road

with a genuine Catholic female-hostel history.

That does not authenticate the document.

But it makes the location worthy of investigation.

The same principle applies to the later **6 Ellerdale Road** entry.

It is a real Catholic female residence associated with **St Marcellina**.

Thus the alleged dossier contains:

176 Clapham Road

↓

female Catholic accommodation

and later:

6 Ellerdale Road

↓

female Catholic residence

and:

St Mary's

↓

obstetrics/gynaecology.

The three London locations form a striking pattern.

The material therefore concludes that the London theory is no longer merely:

"the Vatican document mentions London."

It is:

a purported Vatican expenditure record names a London female-accommodation address; the address is real and historically associated with Catholic female accommodation; another London Catholic female residence appears later in the same alleged account; a London hospital's obstetrics/gynaecology department appears later; Vatican security personnel appear in connection with the London activity; and an independent witness reportedly described an unusual Vatican-requested Rome–London flight shortly after Emanuela's disappearance.

None of these elements individually proves that Emanuela was in London.

Together, however, they justify treating London as a **major branch of the reconstruction rather than a peripheral speculation**.

There is another extraordinary feature.

The document allegedly records expenses not merely for accommodation and medical care but for **press management** and **investigation of depistaggio**.

The Benotti entry concerns:

press-management activity coordinated by Dr Teofilo Benotti — L.5 million.

The next entry concerns:

investigative activity relating to depistaggio — L.9 million.

Thus the purported account appears to describe not only the maintenance of people or accommodation but also an effort to **manage information and investigate deliberate misdirection**.

This makes the document potentially much more than a list of personal expenses.

The material's present interpretation is that it may represent a **consolidated account of activities relating to Emanuela**, containing both:

personal / custodial expenses

and

investigative / operational expenses.

That is why the total cannot simply be called "money spent on Emanuela personally."

The accommodation, food, medical and transfer expenses potentially belong to a personal or custodial branch.

The investigations, press management, recorded tapes, phonographic analysis, Casaroli, Poletti and depistaggio entries potentially belong to an operational branch.

The two categories appear to coexist inside the same purported accounting record.

This produces a potentially coherent interpretation:

PERSON

→ accommodation

→ food

→ medical care

→ gynecology

→ transfers.

And simultaneously:

OPERATION

→ investigation

→ security

→ foreign activity

→ press management

→ depistaggio

→ political/institutional management.

If authentic, the document could therefore represent the financial footprint of an **ongoing operation surrounding Emanuela**, rather than simply the costs of looking for a missing girl.

That is the central reason the document matters.

It potentially changes the question from:

"How much did the Vatican spend investigating Emanuela's disappearance?"

to:

"What activities did the Vatican believe required fourteen years of expenditure in connection with Emanuela?"

The distinction is enormous.

And it brings us back to the survival hypothesis.

If the expenditure was purely investigative, the long chronology could be explained by an unusually prolonged investigation.

If the personal-looking expenses were directly connected to Emanuela herself, the chronology could instead indicate **prolonged physical custody or maintenance**.

If both categories belong to one operation, the document could potentially describe both **what happened to Emanuela and how the institution managed the consequences**.

That possibility remains conditional on authenticity and identification.

But it is the possibility that gives the dossier its extraordinary importance.

The final entry is perhaps the most dramatic:

transfer to Vatican City / final procedures — L.21 million.

If this refers directly to Emanuela, it could imply that the person being maintained abroad was brought back to Vatican City in **1997**, fourteen years after her disappearance.

If it refers to something else, the significance changes completely.

The document itself cannot answer that question.

But it gives us a precise point at which the long chronology apparently ends.

That is why the five-page dossier cannot simply be dismissed as an odd collection of expenses.

Nor can it be declared genuine without authentication.

Its correct status is:

an extraordinary, disputed, unauthenticated document whose contents, if genuine and if they refer directly to Emanuela, would fundamentally alter the reconstruction of her disappearance.

The central possibility is therefore:

1983

↓

removal from home

↓

criminal/Vatican transition

↓

foreign accommodation

↓

security involvement

↓

medical care

↓

continuing accommodation

↓

institutional management

↓

1997 transfer to Vatican City.

That is the financial trail we must now follow into London.

Clapham Road and Ellerdale Road

The London branch becomes concrete around two addresses: **176 Clapham Road** and **6 Ellerdale Road**. Both are associated with Catholic female accommodation, and both appear in the alleged Vatican expenditure material at different stages of the fourteen-year chronology. Neither address proves that Emanuela lived there, but the combination of location, institutional function, timing and expenditure creates a pattern that is difficult to dismiss as a random collection of London references.

The first address is recorded in the purported dossier as:

176 Chapman Road, London.

The material records that this address appears to contain an apparent error. There is no corresponding 176 Chapman Road matching the relevant description, but **176 Clapham Road** does exist. Fittipaldi investigated the discrepancy and identified the Clapham Road location as a Catholic female hostel.

That discovery is important for two reasons.

First, the address is real.

Second, its institutional function is remarkably compatible with the type of accommodation required by the survival hypothesis.

The material records:

174–176 Clapham Road

↓

Catholic institutional property

↓

female accommodation.

The Scalabrinian organization currently describes the facility as **female hostel services**, providing medium- or long-term accommodation to female tenants, including students and working women. The accommodation consists of rooms or small shared flats with kitchen and bathroom facilities, with stays ranging from approximately six months to two years.

That is significant because it offers a very different concealment model from the stereotypical image of a hidden prisoner.

A person concealed in such a setting would not necessarily have to be locked in a basement.

She could theoretically appear to be an ordinary resident.

She could have:

a room

a bed

food

access to a kitchen

a bathroom

other women around her

an apparently legitimate institutional explanation for her presence.

The concealment mechanism would therefore be:

institutional residential cover

rather than:

secret dungeon.

That distinction is important to the sexual-exploitation hypothesis.

A victim does not necessarily have to be physically chained or continuously imprisoned in an isolated location.

A controlled residential environment can be more effective.

The victim may be given a name.

She may be told not to contact her family.

She may be isolated socially.

She may be represented as a foreign student or worker.

The institution may believe an official explanation.

And people outside the institution may have no reason to suspect anything.

The material therefore identifies a possible mechanism:

new name

↓

religious/social isolation

↓

restricted correspondence

↓

institutional control of information

↓

family unable to contact her

↓

outside investigators unable to identify her.

Again, this is a hypothetical mechanism.

There is no document in the material saying:

"Emanuela Orlandi lived at 176 Clapham Road."

That absence must be acknowledged.

But historical reconstruction does not always proceed through one perfect document.

It can proceed through convergence.

The material states the methodological principle explicitly:

A

→ location exists.

B

→ location had an appropriate institutional function.

C

→ money was paid to or for the location.

D

→ timing corresponds.

E

→ independent transport evidence exists.

F

→ another witness describes movement consistent with the scenario.

The combined pattern can become much more significant than any individual element.

Clapham Road contains several of those elements.

The address exists.

It has a Catholic institutional history.

It has female accommodation.

The purported dossier assigns **L.8 million** to food and accommodation there during **1983–85**.

And separate material records an alleged Vatican-requested Rome–London flight shortly after Emanuela disappeared.

That is a meaningful convergence.

But there is an important historical complication.

We must **not simply call the 1983–85 facility "the Scalabrini hostel" without qualification**.

The material discovered an institutional discrepancy.

A **2002 Catholic directory** lists:

Casa dello Studente delle Suore Dorotee di Cemmo

at:

174–176 Clapham Road, London SW9 0LA.

The same directory lists the **Scalabrini Fathers** at:

20 Brixton Road.

This means that the precise institutional operator of 174–176 Clapham Road in **1983–85 remains unresolved**.

The historical sequence presently available is therefore:

1983–85

→ operator unknown.

↓

2002

→ Sisters of Dorothy of Cemmo listed at 174–176 Clapham Road.

↓

2014

→ Scalabrini female-hostel documentation.

↓

2019–22

→ Lambeth identifies Scalabrini Hostel at 174–176 Clapham Road.

This is more precise than simply saying that Scalabrini operated the property in 1983.

It leaves open several possibilities:

Dorotee di Cemmo

Scalabrini

another Catholic body

shared institutional control

transfer of management

or

an institutional arrangement that changed over time.

That uncertainty is not a weakness to be hidden.

It is an important historical clue.

If the operator changed during the period covered by the dossier, that could potentially correspond to some of the later transfers recorded in the alleged account.

The material therefore proposes a working chronology:

1983

→ one institution?

↓

1985

→ possible institutional change?

↓

later London accommodation

↓

6 Ellerdale Road

↓

medical care

↓

later transfer

↓

Vatican City.

We cannot yet say that the financial "second transfer" corresponds to a change of hostel.

But the existence of multiple Catholic residences makes that possibility worth considering.

The **L.8 million** Clapham payment is itself interesting.

The material records it as:

Rette Vitto e Alloggio — L.8,000,000

for 176 Chapman Road.

That wording means **board and accommodation**.

Fittipaldi's reconstruction indicated that the amount was compatible with approximately a year of board and lodging at the time.

This matters because the amount does not look like an enormous clandestine payment.

It looks like an institutional accommodation expense.

That is exactly what one would expect if a person were being maintained inside an ordinary residential institution.

The concealment would therefore not necessarily depend upon paying huge sums to hide someone.

It could depend upon paying an ordinary institutional fee under a particular identity.

This is one reason the Clapham entry is so interesting.

It potentially provides a mechanism through which a person could be maintained without attracting the attention that an obviously secret facility would attract.

The second address is:

6 Ellerdale Road, London NW3 6NB.

The material identifies this as the **Institute of St Marcellina**, a Catholic female residence for foreign students and young women. The institution's own description identifies it as accommodation for foreign female students coming to London to study.

Thus the second address independently fits the same general institutional category:

female

Catholic

residential

long-term

young women / students.

The purported dossier associates **Camillo Cibin** with this address during the period **February 1985–February 1988**, recording:

L.18 million

for his transfer and stay.

This is one of the strongest concrete entries in the alleged dossier because it names:

a person

an address

a location

a period

and

an amount.

But again, there is a contradiction.

A nun interviewed by *L'Espresso* reportedly stated that the institution did not accommodate men and did not remember Cibin staying there.

That contradiction creates several possible explanations.

Perhaps the dossier is false.

Perhaps the address was used administratively.

Perhaps Cibin's expenses were connected with another accommodation arrangement.

Perhaps the historical institution differed from the later one.

Or perhaps the recorded arrangement was unusual and not known to the ordinary residents.

The material does not resolve the contradiction.

But the contradiction actually makes the address more important as an investigative object.

A straightforwardly false story would be easier to dismiss.

A documented institution, a named security official and a disputed residence claim create a specific historical problem.

The question becomes:

Why does the purported Vatican accounting document place Cibin at 6 Ellerdale Road?

The answer could potentially be found in historical records.

The same applies to Clapham.

The key question is:

Who controlled 174–176 Clapham Road in June 1983?

If the answer can be established, it may identify:

the superior

the administrator

the sisters stationed there

the person collecting accommodation fees

the resident register

and potentially witnesses who were present during the period when Emanuela disappeared.

This is far more useful than simply collecting modern descriptions of the building.

The material identifies the need to reconstruct:

every Dorotee sister stationed there in 1982–86

the manager or superior

the relationship with the Scalabrini Fathers

whether the female hostel had a separate register

the admission rules

whether Italian minors could stay

who owned the property

who collected the fees

whether Vatican or Italian-government money was ever paid there

and the role of **Patrizia**, a woman identified as potentially remembering the early hostel period.

These questions are important because they could transform the London theory from circumstantial geography into a human documentary trail.

The possible sequence is:

DOSSIER

↓

176 Chapman/Clapham Road

↓

female Catholic accommodation

↓

L.8 million

↓

1983–85

↓

possible Emanuela?

↓

institutional transfer

↓

6 Ellerdale Road

↓

St Marcellina

↓

Cibin

↓

St Mary's

↓

medical / gynaecology

↓

later transfer

↓

Vatican City.

The question mark after Emanuela is essential.

The evidence does not allow it to be removed.

But the rest of the chain is independently interesting.

There is another important element in the London reconstruction: the alleged **Rome–London flight**.

Giuseppe Dioguardi, a former Italian Air Force official, reportedly testified that the Vatican requested an unusual flight carrying **two men and two**

women to London shortly after Emanuela's disappearance. The material identifies this as an independent transport strand that potentially intersects with the accommodation trail.

This matters because it supplies something the expenditure dossier alone cannot supply:

movement evidence.

The emerging pattern is:

Dossier

→ London accommodation.

Institutional records

→ Catholic female residence.

Dioguardi

→ unusual Vatican-requested Rome–London flight.

Cibin

→ alleged London movement.

St Mary's

→ medical/gynaecological facility.

The separate strands therefore potentially converge geographically.

That is what makes London a major branch.

The material's current conclusion is not:

"Emanuela was definitely in London."

It is:

The available material supports a serious hypothesis that the Vatican had an organized London component to its activities concerning Emanuela Orlandi.

The strongest converging elements are:

the purported Vatican expenditure for food and accommodation at 176 Clapham Road during 1983–85;

the established Catholic female-hostel function of that address;

the Dorotee/Scalabrini institutional connection;

the existence of a woman who lived there during the relevant period;

later expenditure associated with 6 Ellerdale Road;

the Catholic female-residence function of St Marcellina;

and

the alleged Vatican-requested Rome–London flight.

No single element proves Emanuela was there.

But the combination makes London much more than a speculative side theory.

It becomes a **geographical and institutional branch of the reconstruction**.

The sexual-exploitation hypothesis gives that branch particular significance.

If a fifteen-year-old girl had been abducted and later kept under controlled conditions, a female religious residence would provide a plausible institutional cover.

If she needed medical care, St Mary's provides a potential medical endpoint.

If Vatican security personnel were involved in London activity, the security branch potentially intersects with the accommodation branch.

If money was paid over several years, the financial branch intersects with the residential branch.

And if an unusual Vatican-requested flight occurred shortly after the disappearance, the transport branch potentially intersects with all of them.

The resulting London map is therefore:

ROME / VATICAN

↓

possible flight

↓

SOUTH LONDON

↓

174–176 Clapham Road

↓

Catholic female accommodation

↓

possible Emanuela?

↓

possible transfer

↓

6 Ellerdale Road

↓

St Marcellina

↓

Cibin

↓

St Mary's

↓

obstetrics / gynaecology

↓

later transfers

↓

Vatican City, 1997.

The three London locations are particularly striking because they correspond to three different functions:

Clapham Road

→ female accommodation.

Ellerdale Road

→ female religious residence.

St Mary's

→ women's medical / obstetrics-gynaecology facility.

This is exactly the type of sequence that would be expected if the underlying operation involved the long-term management of a woman.

But it is still a hypothesis.

The material gives us no authenticated admission register showing Emanuela at Clapham.

No authenticated medical record showing her at St Mary's.

No authenticated register showing Cibin at Ellerdale.

No authenticated document proving that the person receiving the accommodation was Emanuela.

The argument therefore rests upon **convergence**, not a single definitive document.

That is precisely why the historical identity of the Clapham institution is so important.

If the operator in June 1983 can be identified, the investigation can move from addresses to people.

If a resident or sister remembers a fifteen-year-old Italian girl, the evidentiary situation changes.

If financial records identify who received the L.8 million, it changes again.

If the 1983–85 resident register exists, it could potentially answer the question directly.

And if the later Ellerdale and St Mary's records reveal a common name, alias, referring institution or payment mechanism, the London branch could connect itself to the wider Orlandi reconstruction.

The material therefore identifies the next decisive targets as:

174–176 Clapham historical operator, 1980–86

Dorotee di Cemmo network

Scalabrini network

6 Ellerdale historical residents and staff

Cibin's actual London movements

St Mary's historical records

Dr Regan / Attachment 28

Attachments 21 and 22

and the other supporting documentation referenced by the alleged dossier.

The London trail therefore ends this stage of the reconstruction with an important but carefully bounded conclusion:

We do not possess proof that Emanuela lived at either Clapham Road or Ellerdale Road. We do possess a cluster of independent, geographically specific and institutionally appropriate facts that make those addresses central to understanding the alleged Vatican operation described by the purported dossier.

And if the survival hypothesis is correct, these addresses may represent not where Emanuela **disappeared**, but where she was **kept after she disappeared**.

That distinction is the reason the London trail matters.

Cibin, St Mary's and the Medical Trail

The London reconstruction becomes substantially more significant when the accommodation evidence is considered together with the alleged movements of **Camillo Cibin**, the references to **St Mary's Hospital**, and the medical entry identifying **Dr Lesley Regan** from the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology. None of these elements, considered separately, proves that Emanuela was in London. Taken together, however, they create a sequence involving Vatican security, female accommodation, medical care, reproductive medicine and repeated movement that is directly relevant to the hypothesis that a woman may have been maintained under controlled conditions for an extended period after the disappearance.

The starting point is Cibin.

The purported expenditure dossier records:

"Spese trasferimento e permanenza Commendator Camillo Cibin presso 6 Ellerdale Road"

with an expenditure of:

L.18,000,000.

The address is **6 Ellerdale Road, London NW3 6NB**, associated with the **Institute of St Marcellina**, a Catholic female residence. The material establishes the institution as a real Catholic residential facility for foreign students and young women. Its current accommodation is for girls aged approximately 16–25, while historical material indicates that its programs also accommodated younger girls, including courses for girls aged **11–18**.

That makes the Cibin entry immediately unusual.

Cibin was not an ordinary private traveler.

He was the senior Vatican security official.

And the alleged expenditure does not merely say:

Cibin — London.

It attaches his transfer and stay to a **specific Catholic female residence**.

The resulting structure is:

CIBIN

↓

VATICAN SECURITY

↓

LONDON

↓

6 ELLERDALE ROAD

↓

CATHOLIC FEMALE RESIDENCE.

This is one of the strongest anomalies in the London branch.

But it is also one of the places where the evidence contains a serious contradiction.

The *L'Espresso* investigation reportedly contacted the Institute and spoke with **Sister Giuliana**, who had been working there since 1987. She stated:

"Noi non ospitiamo uomini"

— they did not accommodate men — and said that if Cibin had stayed there, she would remember him.

This means we cannot simply write:

"Cibin stayed at St Marcellina."

What we can write is:

The purported dossier records expenditure for Cibin's transfer and stay at 6 Ellerdale Road, an address associated with a Catholic female residence, while a long-serving nun subsequently denied that men were accommodated there and did not remember Cibin.

That contradiction leaves several possible explanations.

The dossier could be wrong.

Cibin might not have actually slept at the address.

The address could have been used administratively for accommodation elsewhere.

The expenditure could have related to another person or activity associated with Cibin.

An unusual or confidential arrangement could have existed without the knowledge of ordinary residents.

Or the document itself could be fabricated.

The material does not resolve which explanation is correct.

But the contradiction does not make the Cibin entry irrelevant.

It makes it a particularly important unresolved point.

The question is not simply:

"Did Cibin sleep at Ellerdale Road?"

The more important question is:

"Why does a purported Vatican accounting document place the head of Vatican security's London expenditure at a Catholic female residence?"

One possible explanation developed in our investigation is that Cibin's presence could have represented **supervision or visitation of a person**, rather than ordinary accommodation for himself.

That is an inference.

The document does not say:

Cibin visited Emanuela.

It does not say:

Cibin guarded Emanuela.

It does not say:

Cibin transported Emanuela.

It does not say:

Cibin knew that Emanuela was at the residence.

Those possibilities must therefore remain hypotheses.

Nevertheless, Cibin's appearance is significant because he does not occur only once in the material.

We reconstruct a longitudinal pattern:

1983–85

→ Cibin appears in connection with Vatican security and source interrogation.

1985–88

→ Cibin appears in the alleged London transfer/stay expenditure.

1988–93

→ Cibin appears again in connection with travel alongside **Renato Buzzonetti**, the Pope's physician.

That is not a single isolated reference.

It is a repeated appearance across different stages of the alleged operation.

The material therefore formulates a **Cibin operational hypothesis**:

If the dossier is authentic, Cibin appears to have had an unusually sustained operational role in the Orlandi affair, including control over Italian-source interrogation and repeated London-related activity. This does **not** mean that he abducted or sexually abused Emanuela, but it places him high on the reconstruction's "who knew / who controlled / who transported / who investigated" map.

That distinction is essential.

Cibin's relevance is initially **institutional**, not sexual.

He represents:

security

transport

information control

and potentially:

access to the Vatican's operational machinery.

The sexual-exploitation hypothesis only becomes relevant when his alleged London movements are combined with the accommodation and medical evidence.

That combination is unusually specific.

The alleged London chronology is approximately:

June 1983

Emanuela disappears.

↓

August/September 1983

Former Italian Air Force marshal **Giuseppe Dioguardi** says the Vatican requested an unusual Rome–London flight involving:

two men

-

two women

↓

1983–85

purported dossier records:

176 Chapman/Clapham Road

→ food and accommodation

→ **L.8 million**

↓

1985–88

purported dossier records:

Cibin

→ **6 Ellerdale Road**

→ **L.18 million**

↓

1988–93

purported dossier records:

Cibin + Renato Buzzonetti

→ London movement

↓

St Mary's Hospital

→ **L.3 million**

↓

Dr Lesley Regan

→ Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology

→ reimbursement

→ **Attachment 28**

↓

1993–97

further health expenditure

↓

1997

final transfer toward Vatican City.
The sequence is remarkable because the people and institutions involved change while the alleged London operation continues.

The early period concerns:

accommodation.

The next period concerns:

Vatican security.

The following period concerns:

Vatican security + papal medical authority.

Then:

hospital

-

obstetrics/gynaecology

-

reproductive medicine.

This is the point at which **Dr Lesley Regan** becomes important.

The purported dossier specifically names:

Dottoressa Leasly Regan — Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology

and directs the reader to:

Attachment 28.

The material independently establishes that Regan's professional chronology is compatible with the later part of the dossier period. She qualified in medicine in 1980, obtained Membership of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in 1985, and became a **consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist and senior lecturer at St Mary's Hospital in 1990**. She subsequently became Professor and Head of the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology in 1996.

This matters because it eliminates one possible objection.

There is no obvious chronological impossibility in the dossier's association of Regan with St Mary's during the **1988–93** period.

She was working there during the latter part of that period.

The hospital itself is also real.

The **Mint Wing at St Mary's Hospital** is a genuine historical part of the hospital, and the material establishes the existence of obstetrics/gynaecology and reproductive-medicine services associated with the site.

The alleged dossier therefore identifies a real:

hospital

department

specialty

and

physician.

That does not establish what the payment was for.

It does not establish that Regan treated Emanuela.

And it does not establish that the treatment was related to sexual exploitation.

The material records that *L'Espresso* contacted Regan and that she reportedly denied having invoices under **Emanuela's name**. She also could not remember whether she had treated a girl resembling Emanuela decades earlier.

This is important negative evidence.

It prevents us from writing:

"Dr Regan treated Emanuela."

We cannot establish that from the material.

The correct statement is:

The purported dossier specifically identifies a real St Mary's obstetrician/gynaecologist and refers to reimbursement documentation in Attachment 28, but no independent medical record identified in our material establishes that Regan treated Emanuela.

That makes **Attachment 28** extremely important.

The main five-page dossier gives us only the outline:

Regan

↓

Obstetrics & Gynaecology

↓

reimbursement

↓

Attachment 28.

The missing attachment could potentially contain the details that the main document does not provide:

date

patient

treatment

invoice

referring institution

address

or

patient initials.

Attachment 28 is one of the most important missing pieces in the entire London investigation.

This is particularly important because the medical specialty is not generic.

The dossier did not simply identify:

doctor

or

hospital treatment.

It identified:

Obstetrics & Gynaecology.

And the material establishes that Regan's professional work included **reproductive medicine**, including research into:

recurrent miscarriage

reproductive medicine

menstrual disorders

and

pregnancy loss.

That creates an obvious question within the sexual-exploitation hypothesis:

Why would a purported Vatican expenditure account concerning Emanuela specifically identify a reproductive-medicine specialist?

There are several possible answers.

The medical treatment could have been entirely ordinary.

It could have concerned another person.

It could have concerned a patient connected to the investigation but not Emanuela.

It could have involved pregnancy-related treatment.

It could have involved complications following sexual activity.

It could have involved reproductive-health monitoring.

Or the reference could be misleading or fabricated.

The material does not allow us to select one of these explanations as established.

But the reproductive specialization makes the entry too specific to ignore.

The hypothesis therefore becomes:

sexual exploitation

↓

possible pregnancy or reproductive consequences

↓

obstetric/gynaecological care

↓

St Mary's

↓

Regan

This is a **hypothesis**, not a finding of fact.

We specifically makes the distinction:

What the dossier suggests

→ a gynaecological/obstetric professional was paid.

What we infer

→ there may have been pregnancy-related medical care.

What we do not know

→ whether the patient was Emanuela or whether pregnancy was involved.

That distinction should remain visible throughout the book.

There is, however, another medical element.

The alleged dossier later records:

L.4 million

for:

spese sanitarie forfettarie

— health expenses on a flat-rate basis.

Thus the sequence is not simply:

one doctor

followed by nothing.

The material describes:

1988–93

→ St Mary's

→ L.3 million

→ Regan

→ Obstetrics & Gynaecology

↓

1993–97

→ L.4 million

→ continuing health expenses.

This creates a possible **continuing medical-care pattern**.

Again, that does not prove Emanuela was the patient.

But if the person described in the financial record was Emanuela, then the pattern would be compatible with a woman being maintained over an extended period and requiring continuing healthcare.

The sexual-exploitation hypothesis gives this particular importance.

Repeated sexual exploitation could potentially result in:

gynecological treatment

pregnancy-related care

sexually transmitted infections

injuries

reproductive-health monitoring

or

psychological treatment.

But ordinary illness and ordinary healthcare remain equally possible.

The material specifically warns against choosing the most sinister explanation merely because it fits the theory.

The correct conclusion is therefore narrower:

The combination of accommodation, continuing health expenditure and a named obstetrics/gynaecology specialist creates a medical branch that is highly relevant to the prolonged-custody hypothesis, but it does not establish the identity of the patient or the reason for treatment.

The presence of **Renato Buzzonetti** adds another unusual element.

The purported dossier records:

Cibin + Renato Buzzonetti

in connection with a transfer/trip costing:

L.7 million.

Buzzonetti was the **Pope's physician**.

This produces the combination:

Vatican security chief

-

papal physician

↓

joint movement

↓

during the period covered by the purported Orlandi accounting record.

Again, there are innocent explanations.

A security official and a papal physician could travel together for entirely legitimate reasons.

They could have been involved in investigation.

They could have been dealing with a medical issue.

They could have been responding to a security concern.

The document does not tell us which.

But the combination becomes more significant because it occurs in the same general period as the **St Mary's / Regan** references.

The resulting chain is:

CIBIN

↓

VATICAN SECURITY

-

BUZZONETTI

↓

PAPAL MEDICAL AUTHORITY

↓

LONDON

↓

ST MARY'S

↓

OBSTETRICS / GYNAECOLOGY

↓

REGAN.

If the dossier is genuine and all of these references concern the same operation, this would suggest an unusually organized medical/security component.

That still does not establish abuse.

But it would demonstrate that the London activity involved more than accommodation.

It would involve:

security

transport

medical care

and

institutional coordination.

That is exactly what the long-term-custody hypothesis predicts.

A person being maintained secretly for years would potentially require a network capable of providing:

housing

food

transport

security

medical treatment

institutional cover.

The London evidence potentially contains each of these elements.

The purported dossier provides:

accommodation

↓

transport

↓

security

↓

medical care

↓

gynaecology

while the surrounding material provides:

female Catholic institutions

↓

possible residential cover

and:

Dioguardi's Rome–London flight testimony

↓

possible initial movement.

The flight testimony is therefore crucial.

Former Italian Air Force marshal **Giuseppe Dioguardi** said he was working in the private secretariat of Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini in 1983. He testified that the Vatican requested a special flight to London around **late August or early September 1983**, only weeks after Emanuela disappeared.

The reported characteristics of the flight were unusual:

two men

-

two women

- **minimal crew**
- **departure from Ciampino**
- **VIP entrance**
- **preferably at night**
- **aircraft associated with Italian intelligence services**.

Dioguardi was questioned by prosecutor **Stefano Luciani**, and his testimony was also acquired by the parliamentary Orlandi-Gregori commission in secret session.

But his most important qualification is:

he does not know whether Emanuela was on the flight.

That limitation must remain.

The flight is not:

proof that Emanuela went to London.

It is evidence that a former Italian Air Force official says that a **Vatican-requested Rome–London flight involving two women and two men** was arranged shortly after her disappearance.

Its importance comes from the fact that it potentially intersects with the other London evidence.

The sequence becomes:

22 June 1983

↓

Emanuela disappears

↓

late August / early September 1983

↓

Vatican-requested Rome–London flight

↓

two women + two men

↓

1983–85

L.8 million

↓

176 Clapham Road

↓

female Catholic accommodation

This is not proof that one of the two women was Emanuela.

But it is a remarkable coincidence within the chronology.

The material therefore identifies the six converging elements:

Source A

Purported Vatican expenditure dossier:

London accommodation 1983–85.

Source B

Catholic institutional history:

female hostel at Clapham Road.

Source C

Historical investigation:

early hostel management associated with the Dorotee network.

Source D

Patrizia Diaz:

lived there during 1983–85.

Source E

Dioguardi:

Vatican-requested unusual Rome–London flight.

Source F

Flight composition:

two women + two men.

The combination is important precisely because it does not depend entirely upon one witness.

The dossier is one source.

The existence and function of the building are another.

Patrizia's residence there is another.

Dioguardi's testimony is another.

St Marcellina is another.

Cibin is another.

St Mary's is another.

Regan is another.

They are not all equally strong.

They do not all prove the same thing.

But together they create a geographical and institutional pattern.

The London branch can therefore be represented as:

ROME / VATICAN

↓

possible Rome–London movement

↓

174–176 CLAPHAM ROAD

↓

female Catholic accommodation

↓

possible transfer

↓

6 ELLERDALE ROAD

↓

St Marcellina

↓

CIBIN / VATICAN SECURITY

↓

CIBIN + BUZZONETTI

↓

ST MARY'S

↓

OBSTETRICS / GYNAECOLOGY

↓

REGAN

↓

continuing health expenditure

↓

later transfers

↓

VATICAN CITY, 1997.

This is the strongest version of the London custody hypothesis currently supported by the material.

But it is important to state exactly what the hypothesis claims.

It does **not** claim:

Emanuela was definitely at Clapham Road.

It does **not** claim:

Emanuela was definitely at Ellerdale Road.

It does **not** claim:

Cibin definitely visited Emanuela.

It does **not** claim:

Regan definitely treated Emanuela.

It does **not** claim:

the 1983 flight definitely carried Emanuela.

It does **not** claim:

the medical expenses definitely resulted from sexual abuse.

The hypothesis is narrower:

If the purported dossier is authentic and its personal/custodial expenditures concern Emanuela, then the London evidence is

compatible with a prolonged operation involving female accommodation, Vatican security movements, medical care and reproductive medicine.

That is the proposition the evidence can presently support.

The **Cibin question** is particularly important because it potentially connects the residential and security branches.

The **Regan question** connects the residential and medical branches.

The **Dioguardi flight** potentially connects Rome and London.

And the **Clapham/Ellerdale addresses** connect the financial record to real Catholic institutions serving women.

The branches therefore converge:

Residential branch

Clapham

↓

female hostel

↓

Ellerdale

↓

female religious residence.

Security branch

Cibin

↓

London

↓

Ellerdale

↓

Cibin + Buzzonetti.

Medical branch

St Mary's

↓

Obstetrics/Gynaecology

↓

Regan

↓

continuing health expenditure.

Transport branch

Rome

↓

Vatican-requested flight

↓

two men + two women

↓

London.

If the same individual connects these branches, the reconstruction would become dramatically stronger.

At present, that individual has not been identified.

The person could be Emanuela.

It could be another woman.

It could be multiple people.

The alleged dossier could describe activities concerning an investigation rather than direct custody.

Or some of the entries could be fabricated.

This is why the missing supporting documents are so important.

Attachment 21 reportedly contains monthly and annual details behind the **L.100 million** all-inclusive expenditure.

Attachment 22 contains equivalent details behind the **L.70 million** expenditure.

Attachment 28 contains the detailed documentation concerning Regan.

These attachments could potentially turn the London theory from a pattern of clues into a financial chronology:

month

→ **payment**

→ **recipient**

→ **location**

→ **purpose**.

If the same institution, person or location repeatedly appears, the long-term-custody hypothesis becomes considerably stronger.

If the payments instead prove to be ordinary investigative expenses, the hypothesis becomes weaker.

If the medical attachment identifies another patient, the sexual-exploitation branch would have to be revised.

If Cibin's travel records show that he never went to London during the alleged period, the security branch would weaken.

If the Clapham accommodation records identify Emanuela or a plausible alias, the residential branch would strengthen enormously.

This is why the London investigation is fundamentally different from speculation.

It produces **testable claims**.

The purported dossier says:

L.8m

→ Clapham.

L.18m

→ Cibin / Ellerdale.

L.3m

→ St Mary's.

Regan

→ Obstetrics & Gynaecology.

L.4m

→ continuing health expenses.

L.100m

→ all-inclusive expenditure.

L.70m

→ later all-inclusive expenditure.

And Dioguardi says:

Vatican

→ special Rome–London flight

→ two men + two women.

The question is whether these pieces describe one continuing operation.

Our long-term-custody hypothesis says that they may.

The proposed structure is:

1983

Emanuela disappears.

↓

late summer 1983

possible Vatican-requested London movement.

↓

1983–85

possible female accommodation at Clapham.

↓

1985–88

possible movement through another Catholic female residence, with Cibin appearing in the financial record.

↓

1988–93

Cibin and Buzzonetti appear together; St Mary's and Regan appear in the medical branch.

↓

1993–97

continuing health and accommodation expenditure.

↓

1997

possible final transfer toward Vatican City.

This is not simply a story of a missing girl.

If the documents are genuine and refer directly to her, it is a story of **continuity**.

Someone or something continued to require money.

Someone or something required accommodation.

Someone or something required transportation.

Someone or something required medical care.

Someone or something required security.

Someone or something eventually required a transfer back toward Vatican City.

That is why the phrase **"long-term custody"** is appropriate as a hypothesis.

It describes the structure that the financial record would imply if the personal-looking expenses belonged to Emanuela.

The alternative is that the document represents only the cost of investigating her disappearance.

But that interpretation has its own difficulty.

An ordinary investigation can certainly involve:

travel

foreign investigations

press management

interviews

security

recorded material

and

investigative operations.

But the combination of:

female accommodation

-

continuing health expenditure

-

gynaecology

-

a named obstetrician

-

multiple transfers

creates a different kind of question.

Why were these expenditures grouped into an account concerning activities relating to Emanuela?

The material's working interpretation is that the five pages may represent a **consolidated account**, combining:

personal/custodial expenses

with

investigative/operational expenses.

That explains why the document contains both accommodation and gynecology on one side and Casaroli, Poletti, press management and depistaggio on the other.

Under this interpretation, the medical entries become potentially personal expenses within a larger institutional account.

And that is where the sexual-exploitation hypothesis becomes relevant.

If Emanuela survived, was maintained abroad and was sexually exploited, then medical treatment could potentially have been required.

If she was pregnant, an obstetrician could potentially have become involved.

If she suffered injuries or reproductive-health consequences, gynaecological care could potentially have been required.

If she was simply ill, the same expenses could occur without any sexual connection.

The evidence cannot presently distinguish between these possibilities.

But the medical branch is sufficiently specific to demand attention.

The same is true of Cibin.

If his London expenditure was genuinely connected with the Orlandi affair, then the head of Vatican security was involved in London activity during the period in which the alleged dossier records female accommodation.

That does not make him a perpetrator.

It places him in the **operational environment**.

And the combination of:

Cibin

-

Buzzonetti

-

St Mary's

-

Regan

suggests that security and medical functions may have intersected.

The material therefore reaches a cautious but important conclusion:

The London trail contains a potentially coherent long-term sequence involving female accommodation, Vatican security movements, medical and gynaecological expenditure, and a reported Rome–London movement involving two men and two women. If the purported dossier is authentic and its personal expenses concern Emanuela, this combination is compatible with a prolonged controlled-custody scenario. It does not yet establish where Emanuela lived, who treated her, or whether the medical care resulted from sexual exploitation.

That is precisely why the London trail cannot be dismissed.

It may ultimately prove to be a false trail.

It may prove to describe only an investigation.

Or it may prove to be the financial footprint of something far more extraordinary:

a young Vatican citizen who disappeared in 1983, was moved abroad, lived for years under controlled conditions, received medical care, and was eventually returned to Vatican City.

The next question is therefore no longer merely **whether London appears in the documents**.

It is:

whether the fourteen-year chronology can be reconstructed as the history of one continuing person.

Reconstruction of Emanuela Orlandi

The reconstruction that emerges from our material begins with **Emanuela's selection and approach**. The apparently respectable Avon opportunity may

have provided the mechanism through which a fifteen-year-old girl could be drawn away from her ordinary routine, after which she disappeared and, according to Sabrina Minardi's account, entered the custody of the **De Pedis criminal environment**.

From there, the reconstruction takes a decisive turn toward the Vatican.

Minardi described Emanuela as being confined within the De Pedis environment and subsequently transferred to a **Vatican-connected clerical-looking man arriving in a Vatican-plated vehicle**. We cannot conclusively identify that man, but the transfer provides the crucial bridge between the Roman criminal network and the Vatican branch of the story.

The Marcinkus connection then becomes particularly significant.

Our material places **Marcinkus and De Pedis** within the same broader reconstruction and records Minardi's allegations that she knew Marcinkus and supplied women to him. Separately, the Vatican Gardens testimony describes an earlier sexualized encounter involving Emanuela and a senior prelate, creating the possibility that her disappearance followed an already existing pattern of sexual access rather than being an entirely random kidnapping.

The resulting reconstruction is therefore:

prior Vatican sexual contact / selection

↓

Avon opportunity

↓

Emanuela disappears

↓

De Pedis network

↓

confinement

↓

Vatican-plated vehicle

↓

clerical intermediary

↓

possible Vatican sexual exploitation

↓

continued controlled custody.

The next stage is supplied by the extraordinary **purported Vatican expenditure dossier**. If authentic, it records fourteen years of activities associated with Emanuela's removal, including accommodation, transfers, Vatican security personnel, medical and gynecological expenditure, press management, investigative activity and ultimately a transfer toward Vatican City in 1997.

This is why we interpret the document as potentially describing more than an investigation.

Its structure is compatible with two simultaneous branches:

PERSONAL / CUSTODY

→ accommodation
→ food
→ medical care
→ gynecology
→ transfers
→ health expenses

OPERATIONAL

→ investigations
→ foreign activity
→ recorded material
→ press management
→ depistaggio investigation
→ Casaroli
→ Poletti.

If those personal expenses genuinely concerned Emanuela, the most coherent explanation is that she remained under some form of **Vatican-linked control for an extended period**.

The London trail then becomes part of the same reconstruction.

The purported account places accommodation at **176 Clapham Road**, later activity at **6 Ellerdale Road**, Vatican security chief **Camillo Cibin** in connection with London, and later medical activity involving **St Mary's Hospital** and an obstetrics/gynaecology specialist. Dioguardi's testimony about an unusual Vatican-requested Rome–London movement involving two men and two women provides an additional transport element.

The possible sequence is therefore:

ROME

↓

DE PEDIS CUSTODY

↓

VATICAN TRANSFER

↓

CONTROLLED CUSTODY

↓

LONDON

↓

CATHOLIC FEMALE ACCOMMODATION

↓

MEDICAL / GYNAECOLOGICAL CARE

↓

FURTHER MOVEMENTS

↓

1997 TRANSFER TOWARD VATICAN CITY.

Within our sexual-abuse reconstruction, this suggests a particularly disturbing possibility: **Emanuela's disappearance may have been only the beginning of the crime, rather than the crime itself**. She may have been sexually exploited and psychologically controlled over a prolonged period before being moved into a religious environment where a different identity, institutional authority and isolation could prevent her from returning to her family.

The proposed psychological mechanism is equally important.

She could theoretically have been told that her family was in danger, that returning home would put them at risk, or that she was being hidden temporarily for her own protection. If combined with religious authority and a false identity, such manipulation could potentially maintain control without requiring continuous physical imprisonment.

The complete reconstruction therefore becomes:

Emanuela is selected

↓

Avon opportunity

↓

abduction

↓

De Pedis-associated confinement

↓

transfer to Vatican-connected intermediary

↓

possible Vatican sexual exploitation

↓

prolonged controlled custody

↓

London religious accommodation

↓

medical / reproductive care

↓

continuing Vatican-linked expenditure

↓

further transfers

↓

possible return toward Vatican City in 1997.

This is the explanation that, in our view, best integrates the otherwise separate strands contained in the materials.

But the components do not all possess the same status.

The **De Pedis connection** is supported by the criminal-world material and Minardi's account, although her testimony contains serious contradictions.

The **Vatican transfer** rests principally on that testimony.

The **Marcinkus sexual connection** remains an allegation.

The **Vatican Gardens incident** is testimonial.

The **expenditure dossier** is extraordinarily specific but remains unauthenticated.

The **London accommodation and medical trail** is therefore highly significant but does not independently identify Emanuela at every location.

The conclusion is consequently not that every detail has been proven individually.

It is that the **combined structure forms a coherent reconstruction** in which the disappearance, De Pedis custody, Vatican transfer, sexual exploitation hypothesis, prolonged custody, London accommodation, medical expenditure and eventual Vatican movement are potentially parts of one continuing operation.

The central finding of this reconstruction is therefore simple:

Emanuela may not have disappeared into nothingness on 22 June 1983. She may have disappeared into a system.

A system in which the Roman criminal underworld could provide the initial acquisition, a Vatican-connected intermediary could receive her, powerful Vatican figures could potentially provide protection or control, and religious institutions could later provide concealment.

If the purported financial record is genuine, the most disturbing implication is that this system may have continued operating around her for years.

And if the sexual-exploitation hypothesis is correct, the girl who disappeared from Rome in 1983 may have remained alive, controlled and exploited long after the public understood her to be simply a missing person.

That is the reconstruction produced by the convergence of our material.

Conclusion: The Vatican Abuse System

The investigation began with individual cases, but the accumulated material ultimately revealed something broader: a recurring institutional architecture in which **spiritual authority, hierarchy, secrecy, money, institutional loyalty and reputation** could create conditions in which sexual abuse was difficult to expose and difficult to punish. The historical material provides early examples of closed religious communities, clerical authority and restricted outside access; the modern cases show these mechanisms operating through religious orders, dioceses, seminaries and the Roman Curia.

The historical continuity must not be misunderstood as proof of one uninterrupted conspiracy.

The evidence instead shows recurring institutional conditions.

In medieval religious communities, enclosure, obedience, confession and clerical authority could create relationships of extraordinary dependency. In the modern Church, those relationships could be reproduced through seminaries, religious orders, schools, closed communities and hierarchical offices.

Authority gave access.

Dependency made resistance difficult.

Secrecy kept allegations inside ecclesiastical structures.

Institutional reputation created an incentive to avoid scandal.

Money strengthened powerful organizations and influential individuals.

Hierarchy determined who could investigate whom.

Jurisdictional separation meant that canonical proceedings and ordinary criminal justice operated according to fundamentally different rules.

These mechanisms did not operate identically in every case. But their recurrence is the central finding of the investigation.

Marcial Maciel provides the clearest modern example.

His organization combined charismatic authority, enormous fundraising capacity, institutional prestige, papal access and a system in which people who challenged him could be discredited or distanced. The Vatican's later findings established the seriousness of his conduct, while his long period of institutional success demonstrated how a powerful religious founder could become extraordinarily difficult to challenge.

McCarrick demonstrates another dimension: the problem of what senior Church authorities knew, when they knew it, and how institutional advancement could continue despite allegations and warnings. His importance to this book is therefore not only the alleged conduct itself, but the chain of information, appointments and decisions surrounding a powerful member of the hierarchy.

Sant'Ambrogio demonstrates that this architecture was not confined to male priests abusing children. Inside a closed female religious community, spiritual authority, confession, obedience, supernatural claims, sexual manipulation and institutional hierarchy could become intertwined. The historical case therefore provides an early model of **spiritual power becoming sexual power**.

Marko Rupnik demonstrates that the same fundamental problem can appear in a modern form. More than twenty women, predominantly former religious sisters, have accused him of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse, while the case has forced attention toward a category extending beyond

conventional child abuse: the exploitation of adults through spiritual authority, conscience and religious dependency. As of the material's 2026 endpoint, the canonical proceedings remain unresolved.

These cases therefore expand the definition of the problem.

The system is not simply:

priest → child → sexual assault.

It can also be:

superior → nun → spiritual dependency → sexual exploitation

or:

religious founder → subordinate → institutional loyalty → suppressed allegations

or:

cleric → victim → bishop/superior → internal handling → delayed accountability.

The institutional environment matters because the perpetrator does not operate in a vacuum.

Around the individual are:

bishops

religious superiors

religious orders

seminaries

schools

Vatican offices

nunciatures

financial structures

communications networks

and ultimately the mechanisms of canonical authority.

We identify three distinct levels of Vatican responsibility that must never be confused.

Direct responsibility means a Vatican official personally participated in abuse, facilitation, concealment or obstruction and therefore requires specific evidence.

Case-management responsibility exists when a Vatican office receives an allegation or case and therefore assumes institutional responsibility for how it is handled.

Structural responsibility concerns the system of canonical governance itself —the rules through which Rome exercises authority over bishops, religious orders, disciplinary procedures, information and appointments.

This distinction is essential to the conclusion.

The investigation does **not** establish that every Vatican official participated in abuse.

It establishes something more precise:

Catholic institutional structures repeatedly created conditions in which abuse could continue because authority was concentrated, victims were dependent, information could remain internal, offenders could be moved between institutions, and institutional reputation could become an incentive against disclosure.

Money belongs inside this architecture.

The Maciel case demonstrates the power generated by fundraising, while the Marcinkus material demonstrates a different form of Vatican financial power through the IOR and its international relationships. Money does not itself prove sexual abuse, but financial strength can create prestige, access, institutional usefulness and powerful relationships capable of reinforcing protection.

The same applies to secrecy.

Secrecy is not automatically a crime.

Confidential canonical proceedings can have legitimate purposes.

But when confidentiality combines with institutional loyalty, weak external oversight, transfers, reputational pressure and limited access for victims, it can become a mechanism through which abuse remains hidden.

That is why the investigation repeatedly returns to the same sequence:

ABUSE

↓

AUTHORITY

↓

DEPENDENCY

↓

COMPLAINT

↓

INTERNAL CONTROL

↓

SECRECY / DELAY

↓

INSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION

↓

EVENTUAL EXPOSURE.

The Orlandi reconstruction belongs in this final picture, but it must be placed at the correct evidentiary level.

The **Marcinkus–Orlandi sexual/criminal hypothesis is substantially weaker than the documented institutional-abuse evidence and the Maciel case**. The Marcinkus financial network is documented; the alleged sexual connection involving women, De Pedis and Emanuela depends heavily on disputed testimony and remains unresolved. The alleged Vatican transfer, London accommodation and purported expenditure dossier create a disturbing reconstruction, but they do not possess the same evidentiary status as established cases of institutional abuse.

Nevertheless, Emanuela belongs in this book because our reconstruction does not treat her as an entirely separate mystery.

It places her within the same **architecture of power**.

The proposed sequence is:

sexualized prior contact

↓

possible selection

↓

apparent recruitment opportunity

↓

disappearance

↓

De Pedis-associated custody

↓

alleged Vatican-connected transfer

↓

possible sexual exploitation

↓

possible prolonged controlled custody

↓

London accommodation

↓

medical expenditure

↓

later movements

↓

possible return toward Vatican City.

This reconstruction remains conditional at several points.

But its significance lies in the way it intersects with the larger institutional pattern.

The Orlandi hypothesis involves precisely the categories that repeatedly appear elsewhere in the investigation:

sexual access

power

criminal intermediaries

Vatican connections

money

transport

institutional accommodation

medical care

secrecy

and

information control.

That does not prove that the same people or the same organization were responsible for every case.

It demonstrates why Emanuela cannot automatically be removed from the larger history simply because her case remains unresolved.

The broader conclusion is therefore not:

"Every scandal was one Vatican conspiracy."

The material does not establish that.

The stronger conclusion is:

Different Catholic institutions and periods repeatedly displayed the same structural vulnerabilities to abuse: concentrated spiritual authority, dependency, secrecy, institutional loyalty, financial and political influence, geographic mobility, weak external oversight and separation between ecclesiastical and criminal jurisdiction.

Maciel shows the charismatic founder.

McCarrick shows the powerful bishop.

Sant'Ambrogio shows the enclosed religious community.

Rupnik shows spiritual and sexual abuse of adult religious women.

The wider abuse statistics show that these are not merely four isolated stories.

And the Orlandi reconstruction asks whether the same institutional vulnerabilities may also illuminate one of the Vatican's most mysterious disappearances.

The final pattern is therefore:

AUTHORITY

→ creates access.

DEPENDENCY

→ makes resistance difficult.

SECRECY

→ limits outside knowledge.

HIERARCHY

→ controls information and discipline.

MONEY

→ creates influence and institutional usefulness.

REPUTATION

→ creates pressure to contain scandal.

JURISDICTION

→ can separate internal canonical consequences from ordinary criminal justice.

Together, these mechanisms can produce an environment in which abuse survives longer than it otherwise could.

Sometimes the institution eventually investigates.

Sometimes it disciplines.

Sometimes it removes the perpetrator.

Sometimes it fails.

Sometimes the truth emerges decades later.

The investigation therefore found neither a Church in which every person was an abuser nor a collection of unrelated accidents.

It found something more difficult and more consequential:

a recurring institutional architecture capable of protecting power from accountability.

And within that architecture, sexual abuse was not merely an individual moral failure.

It could become an institutional problem.

The final question is therefore not simply **who abused whom**.

It is:

What kind of institution allowed the abuse to continue, who possessed the power to stop it, what happened when that power was not used, and why did victims so often have to wait decades before the institution acknowledged what had happened?

That is the central truth emerging from the material assembled in this book.

And that is why **Emanuela Orlandi, in our reconstruction, belongs to this history**: not because every allegation surrounding her disappearance has been proven, but because her case represents the most extreme unresolved possibility within the same world of sexual power, institutional secrecy, Vatican authority, money, intermediaries and controlled information that the documented cases have already revealed.